The GIRL SCOUTS CANOE TRIP

EDITH LAVELL

Christmas

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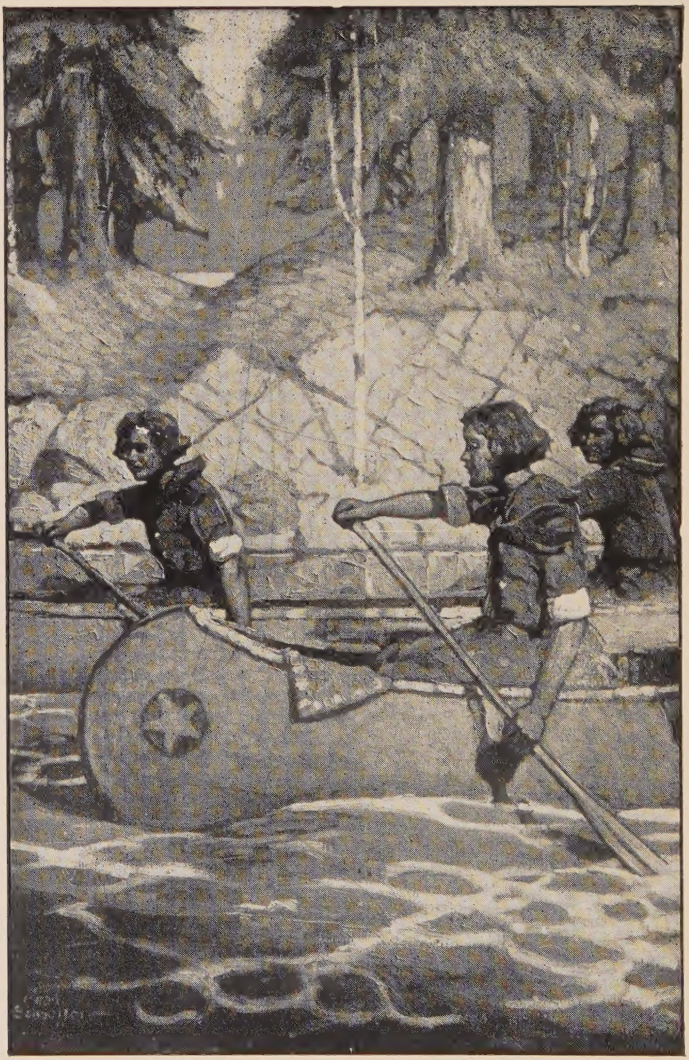

So Marjorie continued her steady strokes, now leaving all but Ruth behind, and taking her place as second.

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THE GIRL SCOUTS' CANOE TRIP

By EDITH LAVELL

Author of

"The Girl Scouts at Miss Allen's School," "The Girl Scouts at Camp," "The Girl Scouts' Good Turn," "The Girl Scouts' Rivals."

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THE

GIRL SCOUTS SERIES

A Series of Stories for Girl Scouts

By EDITH LAVELL

The Girl Scouts at Miss Allen's School
The Girl Scouts at Camp
The Girl Scouts' Good Turn
The Girl Scouts' Canoe Trip
The Girl Scouts' Rivals

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THE GIRL SCOUTS' CANOE TRIP

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THE GIRL SCOUTS' CANOE TRIP

CHAPTER I

AMATEUR CANOEISTS

At a peaceful spot along the Silver Creek, where the water was so still that it seemed to belong rather to a lake than to a stream, five new canoes lay upturned on the shore. Their long, graceful curves, their shining new paint and varnish, their picturesque beauty and obvious excellence of workmanship proclaimed them the best to be had.

Although it was July, the weather was not hot; in this secluded wooded nook where the great shade trees cut off the direct rays of the sun, the atmosphere was almost cool. An old boatman, in charge of a rustic boathouse at the water's edge, stood beside the stream, lost in memories of his own youth and the delightful canoe trips he had taken. Suddenly the laughter of two girls broke in abruptly upon his reveries; a moment later Marjorie Wilkinson and Ruth Henry appeared from among the trees.

"Hello, Michael!" cried Ruth. "How are you?"

But not waiting for any reply, the girls rushed forward to view at closer range their new treasures. With the eye of an experienced canoeist, Marjorie took in every detail.

"They're *Old Towns,* aren't they?" she said. "Oh, but aren't they lovely?"

"Beat yours all to pieces, don't they, Marj?" remarked Ruth.

"Well, I wouldn't say that, but of course——"

"Don't you wish you knew who bought them?"

"You bet I do! Somebody rich, I guess!"

"And wouldn't you love to know where we're going, and how long we'll stay, and—and——"

"I hope you gals is all good swimmers," interrupted Michael, advancing slowly to the edge of the shore. "Purty ticklish business—canoeing is!"

"Not in flat bottom canoes!" protested Marjorie. "Why, I've had mine for nearly a year now, and never upset once!"

"But you never tried to navigate a stream like the Silver!" said the old man, reaching for his pipe and tobacco pouch. "There's one place in this here stream I'd be willing to bet a silver dollar somebody upsets!"

"Oh, where is it?" cried Ruth, delighted that all of the water was not to be so monotonous as it seemed to be in the locality of the boathouse. Already she had visions of the rest of the girls upsetting; and after steering her own canoe safely

through, she saw herself effecting thrilling rescues. There were even medals in life-saving, she had read in the handbook; it certainly would be worth while to possess one, especially if it were the only one of its kind in Pansy troop.

But the old man smoked silently, refusing to explain his remark.

"And are there any wild animals along the stream?" pursued Ruth.

"Hardly!" replied Michael, turning about and going back to his broken chair beside the boathouse. "Maybe a fox or a deer. But nuthin' real dangerous."

Ruth and Marjorie both seemed a trifle disappointed until the latter thought suddenly of snakes, and a shudder passed through her.

"Any snakes?" she asked.

"Oh, mostly black snakes and water snakes. Do you mind 'em?"

"I loathe them!" exclaimed Ruth. "All girls do. But isn't there anything really dangerous along this creek?" she continued. "Besides that one swift place in the water, I mean."

"Jest one thing, and that only scares some folks. It's a quare woman, what lives all alone in a farmhouse by herself."

"Oh, and is she really crazy—stark mad?"

"Some says she's jest sort o' idiotic; wouldn't hurt

nobody—but never was all there. They say she had a husband once, but he's dead now."

The old man shook his head doubtfully, to betray the fact that he did not know whether the report were true or not. Marjorie, who had become tired of this conversation, begged to borrow a paddle to try a canoe, but upon refusal—"according to me orders," Michael said—she strolled off in the direction from which she had come, to look for the others. But Ruth continued the topic which was to her highly interesting.

"What kind of house does the woman live in, and what does she look like?"

The old boatman described an ordinary farmhouse, on the edge of the creek, some distance down stream. "You'll know it," he added; "it's opposite to an old mill—the only big mill you'll see on the trip."

"But would she really hurt any of us girls?" asked Ruth.

"No—hardly! Probably only scare you a bit."

Before she could put any more questions they heard a shout in the distance, and Marjorie was greeting the rest of the party. Ethel Todd and Frances Wright, the two oldest girls of the crowd, walked ahead. These girls were seniors now at Miss Allen's, and as they approached they seemed unconsciously to embody the dignity a member of that class is always expected to display. Marjorie re-

membered when they had been sophomores—at the time when she had entered the boarding school. It was true that their dresses were no longer now, and their hair was still bobbed; but there was something grown-up about their manner of walking. No one would mistake them for boarding school sophomores.

Miss Phillips, their beloved captain, looking more like a girl than ever in her white linen dress, was walking with Doris Sands and Frieda Hammer. The latter was the troop's ward, who was to serve as cook on the canoe trip. And last of all came Lily Andrews, Alice Endicott, and Florence Evans.

Marjorie greeted the girls pleasantly and hugged Lily and Frieda. Over three weeks had passed since they had seen each other, and three weeks is a long time for a girl to be separated from her chums.

They all exclaimed admiringly at the graceful green canoes beside the quiet water, and ran forward eagerly to examine them.

"May we get in right away, Captain?" asked Lily, impatient of delay. She had paddled Marjorie's canoe so often that she knew she could handle one of these.

"No," replied Miss Phillips, noticing the little twinkle in old Michael's eyes at the question. "We are going very slowly."

She bent over and began to right one of the

canoes, so that the girls might see the inside. "As you all observe," she said, "there are five canoes——"

"Aren't they beauties!" exclaimed Lily, unable to keep silent. "Whoever bought them must be rich——"

"Who was it, Captain?" pleaded Ruth. "Please tell us!"

"No; I dare not. But I will tell you one thing: after the trip is over, the canoes are to be the property of the members of Pansy troop!"

"When we graduate, can we take them with us?" demanded Ruth.

"No; they are to belong to the active members of the troop. But you have two years yet, Ruth. You're only a Junior.

"Now—to get back to the subject in question. Suppose we all sit down here. The ground's dry enough, isn't it, Michael?"

"Dry enough for anybody what hasn't got the rheumatiz."

"All right!" laughed Miss Phillips. "Then I guess we'll take a chance."

The happy party seated themselves upon the ground which was well covered with pine needles and dry leaves. Here and there they found patches of moss, but it seemed dry enough not to cause them to avoid it. Miss Phillips began all over again.

"As you have guessed," she said, "we are going

down the Silver Creek. I am allowing two weeks for the trip, although it may take us longer. As far as I know there is only one portage."

"What's a portage, Captain?" asked Lily.

"Lily Andrews! And you a Latin student. Didn't you ever hear the word 'porto'?"

Lily blushed; of course she remembered now. It was one of the first verbs in the grammar: "porto, portare—to carry."

"There is this one place where the stream is very rapid and filled with dangerous rocks, so we shall have to carry our canoes about a hundred yards," explained Miss Phillips.

"Frieda knows all about how to do that," remarked Ruth, significantly.

The girl flushed, and Marjorie gave Ruth a cutting look. Evidently the flags of war were to be hoisted again.

"Is that the dangerous spot Michael was talking about?" she asked, in order to hide Frieda's embarrassment at Ruth's reference to her runaway escapade in the stolen canoe.

"I suppose so," replied Miss Phillips. "It can be done in a canoe, but I prefer the safer way."

"Oh, Captain, aren't we to have any adventure at all?" sulked Ruth. "You know, if there isn't some naturally, we may provide it for ourselves; and then maybe you'd be sorry!"

"There will be plenty of adventure," said Miss

Phillips. "Remember, you all are inexperienced canoeists——"

"Except Marjorie," put in Ruth.

"No, even including Marjorie; for she has never been on a long trip. And it will all be very new to you. Then, at the end of the trip, we shall reach Silvertown, and spend a week there. On Wednesday of that week there will be a canoe meet—races, righting canoes, etc.; and our benefactor will award a silver cup."

The girls scarcely took in their captain's words. Had they really heard her aright—or could there be another place by the same name as Silvertown? Ruth jumped up excitedly.

"Captain, we're not actually going to Silvertown, *the* Silvertown? Is it possible?"

"It's not only possible, but a decided fact. The cottage is all in readiness!"

"But Captain, that's one of the most fashionable resorts in the country! Why, I've heard that it costs hundreds of dollars a day to live there!"

"It does cost a good deal, Ruth," admitted Miss Phillips, still noncommittal.

"And to get a summer house takes thousands—they're so in demand, and the place is so small."

"Very true."

Ruth stamped her foot impatiently, and even the other girls grew a little exasperated. Miss Phillips seemed really mean to tease them so.

"How could we—the humble members of Pansy troop, Girl Scouts—ever dare to hold a canoe-meet on their priceless lake?" asked Ethel Todd.

"Well, we're going to; that's all I can say," replied their captain. "And now, you all understand, I am sure, how much we want to become expert canoeists and bring credit to the troop. So, all during the trip we want to practice as we go along, until the summer guests at Silvertown think we are regular Indians.

"Of course, Girl Scouts will be an entirely new thing to these people; but they are all interested in boating, and horseback riding, and all sorts of athletics; so there is no reason why they should not look favorably upon us. I have heard, too, that they give a great carnival in the interests of charity each year, and it is possible that the winner of the silver cup may receive an invitation to take part in that. But that, of course, is only conjecture!"

"Ye Gods!" breathed Ruth, in awe. "Adopted by that bunch; your social position would be assured for life!"

"Oh, *social* position!" mimicked Marjorie. "Ruth, you are so droll!"

Ruth looked daggers at Marjorie; the latter had sent her a return blow in answer to her knock of a few minutes before at Frieda. But she was not cowed; it would take more than that to defeat Ruth Henry. Instead, she made a mental note of Mar-

jorie's irony, and resolved that she would make her pay later.

"The next thing, I think, is the choosing of canoe-mates. You all know that we shall have two persons to each canoe—one in the stern who steers and does the hardest work, and one in the bow who watches for rocks ahead and also paddles.

"Now would you rather draw lots, to see which girls go together, or would you rather select your own partners? It is immaterial to me, so long as everyone is satisfied."

"Oh, let's draw lots," said Frances, carelessly.

"I don't agree with you," put in Ruth. "We not only travel with the girl, but we occupy the tent with her, don't we, Captain?"

"Yes, except that I will have a tent of my own, and Frieda, who as cook will have more equipment than the rest of you, will sleep by herself. And Frieda and I will travel in the same canoe, but the rest of you girls—the eight of you—will have four canoes and four tents."

"Then let us choose our own canoe-mates!" pleaded Ruth.

"But who would have first choice?" questioned Marjorie.

"Draw lots!"

"All right—as you wish," agreed Miss Phillips, producing a tiny note-book from which she tore out several pages.

On separate slips she placed numbers from one to eight, requesting the girls to draw at random. With her usual good luck, Ruth Henry drew number one; while Marjorie Wilkinson discovered that her paper read "eight."

"I want Lily Andrews!" announced Ruth, triumphantly, to the consternation of the girl mentioned.

"Are you satisfied, Lily?" asked the captain.

Lily hesitated a moment, and glanced shyly at Marjorie. But her chum smiled back at her frankly, and Lily knew that she did not mind.

"Perfectly," replied Lily.

Frances Wright, who held number two, chose Ethel Todd; and Doris Sands selected Marjorie. This meant, of course, that the two freshmen, or rather sophomores, as they now were—Alice Endicott and Florence Evans, should be together.

"You can decide among yourselves which is to be stern man," concluded the captain; "or you may even alternate, if you wish. Now suppose we man our canoes, just as we have decided to travel, and practice a little bit."

A trifle stiff from sitting on the ground, the girls jumped up eagerly, glad of the opportunity for action. Miss Phillips obtained the paddles from Michael, and the girls began to turn the canoes right-side up.

"Why, they haven't any names!" exclaimed Marjorie, in surprise.

"No," replied Miss Phillips; "I forgot to tell you that you are to name them yourselves, and if you will write and tell me your decisions, I will have them painted on the edges before we start on our trip."

Alice clapped her hands joyfully. It would seem so much more like their own canoes if they chose the names, she thought. And all of the others immediately expressed their approval of the plan.

"And now for the paddling," said Miss Phillips, after the girls had pushed their canoes from the shore, and were drifting along rather aimlessly. "Put your shoulders and body into it—then your arms won't get tired. And, above all, don't reach far ahead into the water, or dip too deep. For those are the signs of a novice.

"Both girls watch cautiously for rocks, and rapids, and tree-trunks; but always let the girl in the stern do the steering. Remember—she is the boss, the captain of the boat, as it were. Finally, don't paddle in deep, fierce water—keep away from it. And be sure to keep out of eddies. Now suppose we all paddle down stream for half a mile or so and I will watch your motions and give you directions. Of course we cannot become experienced canoeists all at once."

The canoes shot ahead, following the direction

indicated by the captain. After a short distance the stream became narrower and swifter. Tall banks on either side, covered with trees whose trunks bent toward the water, almost obscured the sun and the sky from view. The girls were enchanted with the beauty of the scene and the joy of the new experience. For some minutes they were too deeply impressed to speak. And although Miss Phillips noticed some very awkward strokes, she had too much tact to spoil the spell of the scene by criticism. That could very well wait.

It was Ruth who first broke the silence. She steered her canoe up to the side of Marjorie's, which had up to this time taken the lead.

"I'll race you, Marj!" she challenged.

"No, no!" protested Miss Phillips. "Not now. Later we shall have some races—but with only one girl in a canoe."

"I wish we were starting to-day," said Marjorie; "it's dreadfully hard to wait."

"But it won't be long," reassured Miss Phillips. "And there is a lot to do. Why, I haven't even bought the tents yet!"

"What kind are you going to get, Captain?" asked Marjorie, who had always enjoyed reading the sporting catalogues which her brother Jack left around the house. "Shelter-halves?"

"I don't know; they're the easiest to put up and really afford perfect protection. I believe that the

men in the army use them for their short overnight hikes."

"And the food?" questioned Ruth. "Shall we have to take loads and loads?"

"No, because I think we can buy things along the way. But of course we need a good deal."

The girls now had their first lesson in turning their canoes about, for the captain decided it was time to go back. As usual, Marjorie accomplished this act with the most grace, and the others exclaimed admiringly at her prowess.

The scouts found it a different matter indeed to paddle up stream, and more than one of them admitted that they were thankful that they were not coming home that way. All but Marjorie felt tired when they handed the canoes over to Michael's keeping at the little boathouse.

"And now one thing more," said Miss Phillips, as they reascended the bank to the edge of the woods. "I have a little present for each of you, which you must take good care of. It's a map of the country through which our stream runs, and where we shall travel. Study it, show it to your families, and bring it with you next Monday when we start off."

"Next Monday!" echoed Marjorie, as she and Ruth left the others at the fork in the road. "I wonder if it will ever come!"

CHAPTER II

HAROLD'S PLAN

RUTH HENRY was hardly inside of her house a minute before she stepped to the telephone and gave a number from memory.

"Hello! Is that you, Harold? . . . . Well, can you come over to our house this evening? I want to show you the map of our canoe trip."

The answer was evidently pleasing to the girl, for she smiled in satisfaction as she hung up the receiver. Then she sat perfectly still, frowning slightly, as if she were attempting the solution of some problem that was troubling her. Her mother interrupted her thoughts by abruptly coming into the room.

"Why so quiet, Ruth?" she asked. For Ruth Henry, although an only child, managed to keep the household ringing with laughter and merriment most of the time.

"Nothing; I was thinking about our canoe trip."

"Are you sure there isn't going to be any danger?" she pursued, rather anxiously. Since time immemorial mothers have feared water sports for their children.

"No; I wish there were more. I'm almost afraid it will be too tame—in fact, I may have to manufacture some excitement!"

"Ruth, don't be silly and rock the canoes, or——"

Ruth laughed scornfully. "Nothing so ridiculous as that, mother," she replied. "Remember, we aren't children; high school girls don't do foolish things to be smart. But I mean some real fun—nothing dangerous, you understand. Harold's coming over to-night to hear all about the trip. And by the way——" she stood up and took her hat from the chair where she had carelessly thrown it in her haste to reach the telephone—"by the way, Miss Phillips says we will end up at *Silvertown* and actually spend a week there in a rented house!"

Mrs. Henry dropped the duster she was holding, in amazement at this announcement. Like Ruth, she had always had social aspirations; money and position meant a great deal to her. They discussed the proposition joyfully for several minutes, Ruth not neglecting to state that she had secured as her tentmate the richest girl of the troop, who had also been president of their class the preceding year. Mrs. Henry beamed, and heaved a sigh of satisfaction; her daughter was a girl after her own heart.

Moreover, Ruth's friendship with Harold Mason, the charming young college freshman who lived next door, was not unpleasing to her. The boy came of a good Southern family of some means,

owned his own car, and seemed perfectly infatuated with Ruth. It was possible, of course, that Ruth might do better in marriage, but she could easily do worse; and while she was so young Mrs. Henry felt satisfied to have her so popular.

The young man did not wait that evening until formal calling hours. As soon as Ruth appeared on the porch, he, knowing that supper was over, ran across his lawn, vaulted the fence, and ran up the steps. The girl smiled at his approach, but she did not get up. They were on such familiar terms, and, Ruth always figured, it is never well to let a man see how much you really do like him.

He lounged into a big porch chair, settling himself sideways and swinging one leg over the arm.

"What's new?" he asked.

Ruth unfolded her map, and handed it to him.

"This," she said; "and of course we tried out our canoes. They're perfect beauties!"

"I'll bet they are," returned the young man, fixing his gaze upon the map. "Let's see—what's this?"

"Well, here's the place where we start from," began Ruth, pointing to a circle at the top of the map; "it's down near the boathouse on the Silver Creek—you know, don't you, where Michael keeps the boats?"

Harold nodded vaguely; he was not very familiar with this section of the country.

"Then you see the stream gets narrower, and

we go along to this cross—Miss Phillips thinks we'll camp there our first night.

"And see, here's where we make a portage—and here, and here, and here"—she pointed quickly from one cross to another—"is where we camp again."

"Do you make any stops?" asked the boy, still keeping his eyes fixed on the map.

"Yes; this circle is Besley, where we expect to load up on more supplies if necessary."

"And how long do you expect to be gone?"

"We reach Silvertown Saturday night a week, and then we'll spend a week there and come home by train."

"Silvertown!" he repeated in wonder. "And you mean to say you end up at Silvertown! Holy smokes! You're the sports!"

"I'll say we are!" agreed Ruth. "But listen, Harold—" her tone became serious now—"we're going to have canoe races, and all sorts of things there, and—and——"

"Great! By Jove!"

"Yes—but for one thing: Marj Wilkinson is the most expert canoeist we have. She'll win everything!"

"The deuce she will!" cried Harold, bringing his foot down to the floor with a bang. "It's absurd, Ruth, for a girl like you to let an ordinary, wishy-washy, bum-sport of a Scout like her beat you to everything. It's just her dumb luck that does it,

that's all. Why, she hasn't any more spirit than a snail!"

Ruth smiled at Jack's enthusiasm. She knew that she had him just where she wanted him. He would go to almost any length to do something to please her.

"Can't you work hard on the way up, and beat her?" he suggested.

"I might, but I'm doubtful. I really think it's a practice, Harold. And then, I've got to admit it, Marj is better at most sports than I am."

"I don't believe it! It's just that she's a diplomat —getting in right with the gym teacher—and all that. It makes me sick!"

"Well, I'll do the best I can," observed Ruth; "for I'd rather have that silver cup, and the distinction that it would carry with it, to have won a meet at Silvertown, than anything else I know of. Why, all the other prizes we've worked for so far seem like mere child's play compared to this one! And besides, I think it would mean a good deal to mother," she added, as an afterthought.

Harold was silent for a few minutes, lost in thought. He looked across the porch to the lawn, where only the very brightest colored flowers were still apparent in the deepening twilight. Ruth watched his regular profile, noting the beauty of it, and a feeling of pride swelled within her at the thought of the young man's staunch allegiance to

her cause. She was fond of Harold, and she meant to use him whenever she could; nevertheless, she realized even now that if she met some wealthy young man at Silvertown, she would never give her neighbor another thought. For it had always been Ruth Henry's habit to dispose of old friends as one might of old clothing—when they seemed worn out, and new ones are desirable.

Harold turned his head slowly towards her.

"I think I have a plan!" he announced.

"What?"

And then with their heads close together, still trying, through the growing darkness, to distinguish the points on the map, he outlined his idea. Ruth squeezed his hand ecstatically; she was very happy.

"Just the thing!" she cried. "And the place must be the house opposite this old mill—" she pointed to a cross on the map which was intended to indicate the latter—"because old Michael says that a half-crazy woman lives there all alone!"

Harold hesitated at these words; he was afraid to go too far.

"Have most of the scouts—and Marjorie in particular—pretty good nerves?" he inquired.

"Yes, indeed! All but Doris Sands. But I'll see that she doesn't become involved. Promise me, Harold, that you'll never tell a soul!"

"Never!" he promised; and they continued to discuss the plan a little longer. At ten o'clock he

put Ruth's map into his pocket to take home and copy, and rose to go. Ruth put her hands on his arm, and looked straight into his eyes.

"It's wonderful of you to do this for me!" she exclaimed.

"I'd do more than this, if I could, Ruth."

"Is there any danger of—punishment, imprisonment, or something like that, I mean?" she asked. "For I wouldn't want you to run any risk——"

"Nonsense!" replied Harold. "They'll never find us out! Besides, its only a prank—if we do put it through."

Ruth dropped her hands to her sides, relieved and satisfied.

"I'll telegraph the word NOW," she concluded, as she started down the steps; "if I want you to do it. And I'll just sign my initials—R. H.!"

CHAPTER III

SETTING OFF

"A LETTER for you, Marjorie," said Mrs. Wilkinson, two days later. "I don't recognize the handwriting."

"It's from Miss Phillips!" cried Marjorie, as she tore at the envelope. "Oh, I wish I had something to open it with!" She looked wildly for her scissors.

"Girls with bobbed hair certainly do miss their handiest tool, don't they?" teased Jack. "Well, since you haven't a hair-pin, I'll lend you my knife. But I don't see why you don't carry your own scout knife!"

"Oh, Jack—in a dress like this?" She glanced in amusement at her dainty pongee Peter Pan, and laughed at the idea of carrying a heavy pen-knife in the pocket, which was really intended rather for decoration than for use.

In a second, however, the letter was opened, and Marjorie was reading it greedily. News from her captain was always more welcome to the girl than anything else, except the presence of the writer herself.

"Let's see it!" said Jack.

The boy, a scout himself, had once gone on a canoe trip, and had camped on a number of occasions, so he was deeply interested in anything that had to do with life in the open.

"Well, we are to wear our uniforms and sneakers, and to take along a sweater, a raincoat, a change of underclothing, three pairs of stockings, two woolen blankets, and our necessary toilet and personal articles; but not any superfluous things that would add to the weight or bulk of our luggage. And each girl is to take her personal scout equipment such as mess-kit, hand-axe, knife, compass, first-aid packet, canteen, field glasses——"

"What about the tents?" interrupted her brother. "What kind are you going to use?"

"I don't know. Miss Phillips doesn't say a word about them. Maybe I could take your shelter-half?"

"Sorry, but Mr. Remington is going to take us scouts on some sort of jaunt, so I'm afraid I'll need it myself."

"Well, since she didn't mention it, I guess I won't bother. Miss Phillips doesn't forget things, so I suppose she is looking after them herself, and leaving the more personal things to us. She doesn't say anything about food either, now that I think of it."

"I'll lend you my fly-rod," offered the boy. "I guess I won't need that."

"What for?"

"To beat carpets with, Silly! What does one usually do with a fishing-rod?"

"But we don't know anything about fishing, Jack."

"You ought to know after all the pains I took last summer to try to teach you how to cast a fly."

"That's true enough," admitted Marjorie. "I hadn't thought of fishing."

"What? Do you mean to tell me that you are going to be on the water for two weeks—fourteen whole days—and you don't expect to do any fishing? Well, if that isn't just like a girl!"

"But I'd be the only one among all those girls," argued Marjorie. "I don't think any of the rest of them would ever think of such a thing."

"Well, what if you are? Just think how Ruth would strut around if she were the only one to think of it. Can't you just see her?"

"You don't seem to care so much about Ruth, do you, Jack?" said Marjorie, glancing up at her brother through her lashes.

Jack studied the figure in the carpet, and shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"N-no," he replied, a bit awkwardly. "I used to think I did, but—I've been seeing things."

Marjorie smiled.

"To come back to the subject again," continued Jack, after a moment of silence, during which each had been occupied by the same thoughts, "think

what fun it would be to catch a nice mess of fish for breakfast; and you could show all the other girls how. Honestly, Sis, you can handle a fly-rod pretty well—for a girl. However, you can suit yourself. To hear me talk, you might think I was trying to sell you something."

"I believe I will take it," said Marjorie. "Thank you for suggesting it."

Jack grunted and strolled over to the window.

"Well, I'd better get to work," remarked the girl, "or I won't have my uniform finished in time."

She folded the letter and turned her attention to the neglected sewing in her lap.

"Speaking of the—er—angels!" muttered Jack, in an undertone, "Look who's here!"

"Jack, do be careful!" warned his mother, from the other side of the room.

It was Ruth Henry who appeared at the gate.

"Hello, everybody!" called the visitor, walking in unannounced, and making no attempt to give Mrs. Wilkinson a less familiar greeting. "Hear from Miss Phillips, Marj?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if she said the same things in my letter she did in yours," said Ruth. "Let's read each others."

"I'd rather not," replied Marjorie, coolly. "I don't care to have anyone read my personal letters —except mother!"

"Excuse me for living!" Then, spitefully, "Of course, your mother reads John Hadley's?"

"She may if she wishes," declared Marjorie, giving her attention to her sewing.

"Marj, I want to ask a favor," continued Ruth, in a different tone. "Will you lend me your canoe this afternoon?"

Marjorie frowned slightly; she had other plans.

"If you get back by half-past four," she said. "Jack promised to give me a few pointers about paddling."

Ruth drummed with her finger tops against the arms of her chair while she considered the proposition. In reality she had entertained no desire to keep the canoe for more than an hour, but when she perceived that by so doing she might retard Marjorie's progress toward proficiency in the handling of it, she was overwhelmed by a desire to keep it all afternoon.

"I did want it till supper time. But it doesn't matter, I guess."

"Was it something special?"

"Rather! Mother wanted to send a basket of fruit to our washwoman's little boy—he's sick, you know—over near the dam. But perhaps I can walk."

"Oh, no; you take it, Ruth. Unless you could get Harold's car?"

"It's being oiled this afternoon. But, really, I

don't think I'd better. It's more important that you practice up for the races!"

"Don't be foolish, Ruth!" put in Mrs. Wilkinson, who had been listening to the conversation. "Your errand is much more important. Anyway, Jack can probably take Marjorie tomorrow."

"No, I can't either," said the boy. "It's base-ball practice."

"Well, then some time before Monday. There's lots of time yet."

But when Sunday came, Marjorie realized that there had not been a single opportunity for her to carry out her plan. Three days of rain and more base-ball practices had entirely prevented its execution, and Monday morning found her no farther advanced than she had been the preceding week.

"Anyway," she remarked to Ruth, as they started together on their journey toward the Silver Creek, "we've had so much rain these last few days that we oughtn't to have any during the next two weeks. And that will be a blessing."

When Ruth and Marjorie reached the boathouse in the woods where they had inspected the canoes the week before, they found the rest of the party had arrived before them. Each scout, including the captain, was dressed in the official uniform of the organization and the contrast of the khaki color against the green back-ground of the woods and the water made a very pleasing picture.

The canoes were lined up at the same place on the shore, in readiness for them; but they were now upright and looked so inviting that the girls longed to get into them right away. Nearby on the ground was piled their miscellaneous equipment; and when the scouts saw what a quantity there was, they protested to their captain that, if they crowded so much stuff into the canoes, there would be no room for themselves.

"We can never get all that in!" cried Ethel. "It isn't possible!"

"I thought we were to travel light," remarked Ruth.

Miss Phillips exchanged amused glances with Michael, but she did not argue the point.

"Just wait till you watch Michael and me do the packing!" she said. "But remember, there are five canoes. Oh, that reminds me, you haven't looked at the names on them yet!"

"That's so!" cried Marjorie, running towards the canoes, and leaning down to examine them. "Did you get my letter in time?"

"Yes indeed! Now, each scout can find her own!"

"Here's the *Ariel!*" cried Frieda, the first to discover hers. "I think that's an awfully pretty name, Miss Phillips."

"And here's the *Water-Witch!*" announced Ruth. "You were satisfied with my choosing that name,

weren't you, Lil? I always admired witches; they seemed so clever, even if they were bad."

"I've found the *Sprite!*" called Ethel. "Only, I wish it weren't so close to the next canoe that I can hardly see the letters."

"I can't find the *Firefly!*" wailed Alice. "Are you sure you got that name on, Captain?"

"Well, that must be it, Alice," said Marjorie; "for here's the *Will-o-the-Wisp,* and that's the only one left."

"True enough!" admitted the other. "And here's the name as plain as anything. I couldn't see it for looking at it."

"Did any of you girls get a chance to practice what I told you last week?" asked Miss Phillips. "I suppose you did, Marjorie?"

"No, I didn't!" The girl flushed slightly, and glanced questioningly at Ruth in the hopes that she might explain the reason. But Ruth said nothing; she had no intention of coming to Marjorie's rescue. "It rained so much—and I had my uniform to finish, besides."

"Marj. doesn't need practice!" said Ruth. "She'll get the cup anyway, without trying."

"Your uniform looks lovely!" said Miss Phillips. "In fact, they all do. I think you girls are all to be congratulated."

All this time the captain had been distributing the folded tents, the cooking utensils, and the food

supplies into five piles, so that the heterogeneous mass had already vanished to half its size.

"But all those things will never go in one canoe!" cried Alice. "Remember, we've got our raincoats and blankets, and the clothes we brought."

"Now I believe I'm ready," announced the captain, after a few minutes' more work, and when the big pile had completely disappeared. "I am going to pack our canoe and let you all watch. Then you may all set to work at yours, and after they are finished, I will inspect them to make sure they are all right."

Naturally a neat and orderly person, the captain, having made a little study of the methods of loading a canoe for an extended cruise, was able to pack her equipment as efficiently as any experienced canoeist. And in addition, she had selected a greater amount for her own canoe than for any of the girls'. She unfastened a bundle containing a number of water-proof bags and proceeded to pack in one of these a part of the perishable food from the supply of flour, sugar, tea, rice, oatmeal, salt, bacon and other things. Next, she stowed away her personal clothing into another sack.

"You can put at the bottom the things you are least likely to need; and the things you might want at any time you can put on the top, so that you won't have to dump everything out to get at them," she explained. "Now when you draw these strings

and tie the top securely, your clothing will keep nice and dry, and even if you should upset, it will float after a fashion. Keep your sweater and raincoat out, so that you can put either on at any time—you can roll the sweater up inside the rain-coat to keep it dry, and put them under the seat or in the most convenient place. My blankets, bed-sack, tent, and mosquito netting will go in another sack. Of course, you'll need to put the heaviest, bulkiest sacks in the middle of your canoe, where they will act as ballast; and see to it that the weight balances properly. See, my load is now too heavy on this side, and tips the canoe; but I'll put this sack over there to even things up. There! That rides splendidly, doesn't it? These cooking utensils we'll put in wherever we can find a place. Now I'm about ready. It didn't take long, did it? With a little practice, we'll be able to pack up in no time. Suppose you all start and do yours."

The girls had watched the process with increasing admiration, until everything, even including Frieda's things, were compactly stowed away.

"Wonderful!" cried Marjorie.

"Pretty soft for Frieda!" muttered Ruth. "Now we've got to do it all for ourselves!"

They all set to work immediately, but the results were not so gratifying, or so quickly obtained. Alice and Florence even suceeded in getting their heaviest load in the bow, and as soon as Miss Phillips dis-

covered this, they were obliged to take everything out and begin all over again.

Finally, all were ready, and one by one, the canoes were pushed off from the shore. Miss Phillips and Frieda, in the *Ariel,* took the lead.

At first most of the girls' strokes were rather uneven, and now and then a splash of water would fall into a canoe. They were all very quiet, so absorbed were they in their new occupation and in the scenery on either side.

"Is it as pretty as this all the way down?" asked Marjorie.

"Even prettier, sometimes, I believe," answered Miss Phillips.

"Oh, look at that big spider!" cried Lily. "Isn't he horrid?"

"Only a water-bug, I guess," said the captain, reassuringly. "And that reminds me, girls, I should like you to keep 'observation notebooks'. Every plant, animal, insect, reptile, fish, flower—in fact, anything interesting in nature that you can identify, please put down. Then at the end of each day we shall see who has been the most observing."

"Well, you can all put down that water-spider," offered Lily, generously. "I'm glad to give him away."

"Miss Phillips," asked Marjorie, "are we to pass any merit badge tests, or do any special work in scouting, on this trip?"

"Yes, it is my hope that every girl will pass the Sailor's test before we reach Silvertown. Indeed, I have so arranged the schedule that we remain one morning at a certain camping spot in order to give the test. Because it would be more difficult to do it at Silvertown, among so many strangers."

"And what does the test include?" asked Ruth, always interested in a new chance to win distinction for herself.

"Oh, it has to do with swimming, and landing a canoe, and tying knots, and—just lots of other things. You can study it up in your handbook, before we take the test."

"I wish I were a first-class scout," observed Alice. "Would there be any hope of my passing that test on the trip?"

"I hardly think so," replied the captain. "But you can do that as soon as you get back to Miss Allen's in the fall."

As the heat increased towards the middle of the day, the girls paddled more slowly, often merely directing the course of their canoes, and allowing the current to do the rest. Miss Phillips did not urge them forward; she realized how weary they were by their eagerness to stop for lunch.

"Be sure to land carefully," she told them. "We don't want any upset cargoes."

"Save the food at least!" laughed Florence. "I'm simply starved!"

Their lunches for that day had been packed by their mothers and savored more of a picnic than of camping out. There was chicken salad, and dainty nut and cheese sandwiches, ice-tea in thermos bottles, and home-made layer cake.

"And isn't it great to be on land again!" commented Ruth. "Why, my legs are stiff already!"

"Is our afternoon trip long?" asked Doris, in a tone that might signify her willingness to remain where she was.

"Oh, hours and hours!" joked Miss Phillips.

"No—it really isn't. We must stop early so that we will have lots of time to put up our tents and cook supper before dark, since this is our first experience. Not more than an hour and a half, and then watch for a cedar grove. See who can find it!"

"The *Will-o'-the-Wisp* will discover it!" cried Marjorie. "Just watch us!"

So hungry had the girls been that there was almost no food to pack away; and soon they were on their way again, taking care, however, to exchange positions in the canoes. Ruth was glad of an easier pull, and though she would not admit that she was tired, when Marjorie announced that she thought she espied the grove they were looking for, it was a very welcome sound to Ruth's ears.

In less than five minutes, the girls were paddling up to the shore, looking for a convenient place to land.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST ENCAMPMENT

"You made your landings rather well," remarked Miss Phillips, as the girls pulled their canoes up on the shore. "I think you won't have much difficulty in passing that part of the Sailor test."

"Now, Captain, 'Where do we go from here?' " asked Ethel.

Miss Phillips looked about her, and seeing a small clearing about twenty-five yards from the landing place, she said,

"Let's go over there in that open place; that looks like a good camping ground."

"Then we won't have to chop any trees down?" remarked Ruth, lightly. "Well, that's a relief."

"It surely is," laughed Alice; "my arms are stiff already."

They commenced unloading the canoes, and when they had everything out they pulled them higher upon the bank and turned them upside down. Then, shouldering the luggage, they carried it to the clearing, making several trips.

"Phew, what a load!" gasped Ruth, as she dropped the last of her equipment to the ground.

"And yet you know that we have only the necessities," said Miss Phillips, who overheard the exclamation. "Now you can understand why I warned you not to bring any superfluous things."

"Well, I'm glad I didn't," answered Ruth. "When do we eat? Where's the cook?"

"We'll put up the tents first, while it's light; that's the reason I wanted to make camp early today," said the captain. "The tents are new to you. Then Frieda will start to prepare the supper, and Ruth, since you are in such a hurry, you may be her assistant for tonight, and gather wood, keep up the fire, and help her in any way you can. Now everyone put the bundles of food and general supplies in one pile over there, so that I can cover it all with a rubber tarpaulin which I brought along for that purpose. We'll put up the tents in a line over here, facing the east. Get out your tents, girls."

"They look awfully small," commented Doris, weighing hers in her hand.

"That is because they are so light," answered the captain. "They're made of a kind of a silk; but they will turn water, and really afford adequate protection on a trip like ours. An experienced canoeist recommended them, and when they are up, you will find them more roomy than you think."

With Frieda's help, she proceeded to raise her own tent, and then Frieda's next to it. The girls watched the process with intense interest; then, with-

out difficulty, each pair of canoe-mates erected their own. Each tent had a floor covering of the same material as the tent, which was sewed on for protection against mosquitos and other insects. Miss Phillips showed them how to put up their mosquito nettings most conveniently, and how to arrange their equipment so as to leave in the tent a maximum of space for them to move about in. And around each tent they dug shallow gutters or trenches, to drain off the water if it rained.

"Now that the tents are up, the hardest part of the work is over," said Miss Phillips. "It took comparatively long this time, but after you become used to it, and know just how to proceed, you'll find that you can put one up and take it down in half the time. I think we'll get our beds ready. We won't have any difficulty in filling our bed-sacks here."

The bed-sacks consisted of flat canvas bags, open at one end, and long and wide enough for one person to lie on. The girls wandered about, gathered dry leaves with which to fill them, and then arranged their beds for the night. Although they had been camping before, they had experienced nothing so primitive as this. Before, they had found their tents already set up, provided with wooden floors and folding cots, and they had prepared their meals on a camp stove. But they liked the primitiveness of this new experience; to many of them the prospect of the evenings seemed best of all.

Frieda busied herself in the preparation of supper, with Ruth as assistant; but she also found many other willing hands to help. The scouts enjoyed the well-cooked, substantial meal, which they literally devoured, they were so ravenous. Then, after the things were cleared away, the fire was built up to a blaze, and they established themselves comfortably around it.

"If anybody gets homesick," remarked Ethel, "I'm going to shake them."

"Oh, nobody will," said Marjorie. "We're too happy for that."

"No, I promise I won't either," said Alice Endicott. "Remember how homesick I was last year at school?"

"I certainly do remember," replied Marjorie. "It was all our fault too. But there won't be any homesick girls next year!"

"No, I mean to do my share, too," added Alice.

"Girls," began Miss Phillips, interrupting the conversation and changing the subject, "I have a new lieutenant for you."

"Good! Who is she?"

"Maybe not so good," said Ruth. "Tell us quick!"

"Guess!"

"A teacher?" asked Marjorie.

"No."

"Not Edith Evans back again?" suggested Lily, hopefully.

"No. I won't keep you in suspense any longer. Frances Wright has successfully passed the lieutenant's test and since she was eighteen the first of this month, she has received the commission. The day that we stop to take the Sailor test, I thought we would have a formal meeting in the evening, and install her in office."

The congratulations that followed assured the captain that she had not made a mistake in her choice.

It was around nine o'clock when the fire died down and the conversation commenced to lag, and they all voted that they were ready to go to bed. The strange croaking of the frogs, and hum of the insects, the distant ripple of the flowing water, and the breeze now and then moving the branches of the trees were the only sounds that broke the stillness of the woods. Tired, happy, and at peace with the world, the girls crept into their tents, and with their blankets wrapped around them, soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER V

THE BY-STREAM

THE experiences of a canoe-trip are sometimes more interesting than those of any other kind of outdoor excursions, for there are not only the alternate pleasures of travelling by water and of camping on land, but there is the added joy of awaking each morning to find a new world. When the girls had pulled their canoes upon the bank the preceeding afternoon, and had busied themselves with the unpacking and the erection of the tents, they had hardly realized how beautiful the spot of their encampment was. Now as they beheld it from their tents in the sunrise, they were deeply impressed. Marjorie was so eager to make the picture a permanent one that she got out her camera before she was fully dressed, and took a snap-shot.

"Marj, you're so energetic!" yawned Doris, who was still buried beneath her blankets. "Probably that's why you get all the prizes that are going. And I do believe you'll get this one, too," she added.

"Not if Ruth Henry knows it!" answered Marjorie.

"Do we swim before breakfast?" asked Doris,

changing the subject hastily. "Or do we get dressed right away in the rest of our clothing?"

"I don't think there are any set rules," replied her companion; "you can do as you please, I guess. But I thought I'd just wash and run down and see if I might help Frieda."

Already the girls in the other tents were stirring, although there had not been any bugle call to awaken them. When Lily Andrews opened her eyes and casually looked at her companion's bed, she received a shock to see Ruth Henry sitting on the edge, lacing up her shoes. She and Marjorie had roomed together for so long, it seemed strange to have another girl as partner.

"Hello, Lil!" greeted Ruth. "Have a nice sleep?"

"Yes, but wasn't it cold, though? I think it was worse than at camp."

"I suppose that is because we are so close to the water," remarked Ruth.

Lily reached for her mirror and brush and comb; then proceeded to arrange her hair, sitting up where she was, in bed. Ruth watched her admiringly; Lily was not pretty, but there was something very attractive about her. And Ruth could never forget the fact that she was the sophomore president, or rather, had been, for the year was over now; but the holder of that much desired office would always seem great in her eyes.

"Aren't you going to wear sneaks?" asked Lily, interrupting the other girl's reverie.

"No, I thought I'd put my high shoes on today."

She lifted the flap and peered out of the tent. Not far away she beheld a bright fire, and Frieda Hammer bending over it, busily cooking.

"I smell breakfast!" she said. "The cook's on the job!"

"Poor Frieda!" sighed Lily; "I wouldn't want to have to get up so early as she has to."

"She gets paid for it!" replied Ruth, who never believed in wasting sympathy where she did not consider it was warranted.

"Say, Lil," she continued, as she proceeded to manicure her nails while waiting for the other, "have you ever been to Silvertown?"

"Never; papa and mamma often talked of going, but it's so hard to get a house, and you know there are no hotels."

"There aren't?" Then, "Who do you suppose could possibly be providing for this trip? He certainly must be a swell."

"I haven't the slightest idea," replied Lily; "though I confess I've thought and thought. Papa knows some awfully rich men in New York; I've wondered whether any of them could have become interested in our troop—and the general idea of Girl Scouts. It's a perfect thing to do, isn't it?"

"Yes, because he didn't just *give* it to us; we

felt we earned it by passing that Pioneer test. And, believe me, we did!"

"And wasn't it just the wisest thing to select that one! Look how much we've used the knowledge already—putting up tents, and chopping logs, and digging holes!"

The girls quickly put the finishing touches to their toilets, and hurried down to the stream to wash. In a few minutes they joined the other eight campers, all seated around Frieda's fire.

"What have you got for us this morning, Frieda?" asked Marjorie, pleasantly.

"Prunes—first!" she announced.

"Ugh!" cried Ruth; "I hate them!"

"Ruth!" reproved Miss Phillips; "remember we all agreed to be pleased with whatever we have—which meant whatever was easiest to carry!"

"Oh, I beg your most humble pardon, Cook!" apologized the girl, with mock solemnity. Then she proceeded to eat one prune.

"Say, that reminds me," remarked Ethel, "I hope our cook doesn't turn out like the cook on board the ship in *Treasure Island!*"

"What was she like?" asked Frieda.

"It wasn't she, Frieda!" laughed Marjorie, who had always read all of her brother's books, among which *Treasure Island* was a favorite. "It was a man—and a regular villain, too! He was a pirate."

Frieda Hammer, still sensitive over the wrong she

had committed the preceeding fall by running away in Marjorie's canoe, blushed guiltily. Miss Phillips, noticing her embarrassment, immediately hastened to change the subject.

"We must make a quick pack, girls, and get away a soon as possible. I want to reach Silvertown by Saturday night of next week you know, if we can. That will give us three good days' rest before the water meet. And I think we shall need it."

"Miss Phillips," inquired Ruth, "is this meet just for scouts, or will there be any young people from Silvertown competing?"

"Only Pansy troop members," she replied, "for such are your benefactor's wishes. But I think from the way he spoke, he will send the winner of our meet back in August for their annual affair."

The whole plan gave Ruth a thrill of pleasure, but she realized it was not an unmitigated joy. Marjorie was still so much more skillful than any of the other scouts, that Ruth despaired of winning; and, to her chagrin, Frieda Hammer seemed to rank second. Moreover she knew that the latter would of course be allowed to compete, although the idea of that crude country girl among the social celebrities of Silvertown seemed to Ruth utterly preposterous.

"Captain," she asked, "won't you please tell us all about the meet—I mean the events in it—so that we'll have a chance to prepare for it?"

"Certainly, Ruth," replied Miss Phillips; "but I can't now, because I don't want to take the time. But if you will remind me this evening, after we are settled and our work is done, I'll be glad to go into details."

Their conversation was interrupted by the appearance of two covered pans which Frieda drew from the vicinity of the fire. One was piled high with hot cakes, while the other held the fish which they had caught, and which were now fried to a tempting brown.

"This surely makes up for the prunes, Frieda!" cried Ruth enthusiastically. "You certainly are a dandy!"

The girls ate hungrily, until every hot cake had disappeared and there was nothing left of the fish but bones.

"I declare I can't budge an inch, after all that food!" announced Doris, making a great effort to stand up.

The burying of refuse, taking down of tents, and packing, was accomplished in a comparatively short time. Miss Phillips realized that the girls were becoming more expert.

Ruth, however, was only conscious of the fact that her arms ached and her shoulders were stiff from the previous day's exercise. Was this, she wondered, because she paddled awkwardly? Neither Marjorie nor Frieda seemed in the least stiff. The

idea worried her. It meant not only that she would not be able to go fast that day, but she feared that a continued strain might seriously incapacitate her for the meet.

But Ruth Henry had no intention of admitting her disability. It was her nature rather to gain her desire by cunning. Accordingly, she decided that this would be an opportunity for a delay.

Fortunately for her, Miss Phillips bade her canoe take the lead.

"Keep your maps handy," she said: "and try not to make any mistakes."

So she paddled quietly ahead for some distance, as long as the stream continued narrow. When she finally saw signs of its widening, and thus affording an opportunity for her to lose the course, she began what she hoped would prove an intensely interesting conversation.

"Now that it's quiet enough for everybody to hear you, Captain Phillips," she called, "won't you please tell us all about Silvertown?"

The girls in the other canoes paddled closer, to listen.

"Well, I've never been there myself," answered the Captain; "so I can't tell you very much about it —only what I've heard and read.

"As far as I know it is almost an island—the river on one side, and the lake on the other. It is very beautiful, I understand—lovely tall trees, and

shady walks; and the houses, which are all occupied only during the summer, are absolutely gorgeous. The whole place contains only about a thousand people—including the servants. And, since there is no hotel of any description, practically everybody knows everybody else."

"And do you suppose they know about us?" pursued Ruth.

"They must, by this time, for our friend secured this house almost six months in advance. He was very lucky about it, too. It seems that it belongs to a wealthy New York man, whom he knows in a business way, and this man takes a yachting cruise each summer during July; so our friend was able to lease it."

"Have you any idea how much it cost?" was Ruth's next question.

"Not a cent under two thousand dollars," replied Miss Phillips; "and maybe more. It's a wonderful house—and there is such a demand for places at Silvertown that an owner can get almost anything he asked. But I understand that they won't lease to undesirable people."

"That's a big compliment to the Girl Scouts, isn't it?" remarked Ruth, swelling with pride.

"Yes, and to the man who is paying for our party!" put in Marjorie. Then, seriously. "Oh, girls, do you suppose we really *are* good enough to deserve all this?"

"I'm sure I'm not," said Frieda Hammer, quietly, gazing downward into the water.

"And now tell us about the house," suggested Ruth.

By this time the stream had greatly widened, until it appeared almost the proportions of a lake. The water was quiet; water-lilies grew here and there on the surface. The high sharp banks with their overhanging trees had vanished; the sun poured brightly down upon their heads.

"We could almost sail here, if we had brought sails," remarked Miss Phillips, before she answered Ruth's question. "Sailing in a canoe is lots of fun."

"Oh, I'd love it!" cried Marjorie. "Tell us how you do it!"

"No, Captain, please answer Ruth's question first," put in Florence Evans. She, too, was anxious to hear all about the summer resort.

"I really can't tell you much," replied Miss Phillips. "Except that the house is huge, and has so many rooms that you can hardly count them. There are lots of swings, too, and a tennis court; and we are to have two machines at our disposal. We'll all have to wait and see it for ourselves, I guess," she concluded, "for I could never do it justice!"

"But, Captain," objected Ethel; "it will take all our time to take care of a house like that. We'll never be able to do anything else."

But again Miss Phillips smiled enigmatically.

"There will be servants to take care of that," she explained; "the same servants who run the place during August."

All this time Ruth had been studiously avoiding the stream which she knew to be the right one. Instead, she followed a little tributary which was becoming narrower and shallower.

"Are you sure we are right, Ruth?" questioned Miss Phillips, reaching into her pocket for her map. "This stream looks as if it were going to come to an end."

Ruth stopped paddling and balanced her paddle across her lap while she too consulted her map.

"If I did miss the main stream," she began, "I can't imagine where——"

But her remark was interrupted by a sharp scream from Alice Endicott.

"I'm stuck in the mud!" she shrieked. "I can't budge the canoe an inch!"

By this time all of the canoes were in extremely shallow water, no longer clear like the swifter stream which they had been following, but so clouded by mud that the exact depth was undeterminable. Tall grass grew here and there—and farther along the water gave almost the appearance of a field. The girls needed no reference to the map now to establish the fact that they were lost. Ruth apologized profusely, lightly blaming Miss Phillips for absorbing her interest in what she was saying.

In the meantime, Marjorie had turned her canoe around so that Doris could reach out her hand and take hold of the stern of Alice's canoe. It was only a few seconds before they too were turned about, and all were paddling in the direction from which they had just come.

"We'll go back as quickly as we can," said Miss Phillips, glancing at her watch. It was already three o'clock.

Ruth paddled swiftly now, realizing that her shoulders were no longer stiff, but in better condition to take up the exercise.

"Here's the place!" cried Miss Phillips, after about an hour of paddling. "But just think how much time we've lost!"

"But we are having a good time!" put in Ruth. It was evident that she was not in the least remorseful over her mistake.

"But we'll have to camp here," answered the captain, sharply. "And if you knew of what is awaiting you at Silvertown, you wouldn't want to lose a single minute more than necessary."

"I believe *someone* especially nice is waiting for *you*," remarked Ruth, significantly.

And the captain was too embarrassed at the inference to reprove Ruth for her undue familiarity.

CHAPTER VI

THE ACCIDENT

It was evening—of the second day of their trip and the scouts were seated about their camp fire, enjoying the leisure after the day's activities. The flame lighted up the immediate circle, and the tents just beyond; but by way of contrast, it seemed to make the blackness of the woods and the water still deeper.

"Anybody want to go for a walk?" asked Miss Phillips, teasingly.

"We want to stay just where we are!" replied Marjorie, who was comfortably leaning against Lily's back for support.

"Remember that dark forest in Barrie's play—'Dear Brutus'—where everybody went on a summer's night and got things they all wished for!" remarked Lily.

None of the others had seen the play, and they asked her several questions about the story.

"It would take an Edith Evans to tell that story well," sighed Lily; "it certainly was a pretty one"

"But wouldn't it be strange," mused Marjorie, "if

we could go into the woods over there and get our dearest wish. I wonder what mine would be."

"To win the silver cup at the races, I guess," put in Ruth. "I'm sure that's my greatest desire at present." Then, becoming very practical, she added, "Now please tell us all about it, Captain Phillips."

"Well, I haven't worked out the exact program," replied Miss Phillips; "but I can tell you most of the things it will include."

"First of all there will be a race——"

"With the same two girls together, just as we are now?" asked Alice Endicott.

"No—one girl to a canoe, for this event. You can't very well sit down when you want to paddle fast—you kneel somewhere in the middle of the canoe. So, if we can't hire canoes there, we will have two races, and then let the winner of each compete."

"That really would be the fairest thing to do, anyway," said Frances. "Because we'll be more used to these canoes than any others."

"Then there will be another event when there are two girls in each canoe, and perhaps a relay race. And finally, there will be a Capsized-canoe Competition. Someone will take the canoe to the middle of the lake and upset it. As soon as the contestant sees this take place, she is to kick off her shoes and dive into the lake, right the canoe, bale the water out, and bring it safely—with its first occupant in it—to

shore. This is undoubtedly the most difficult feat of all."

"But how will you decide who has won the cup?" asked Ruth, when Miss Phillips had finished her explanation.

"Mr. Remington and I are going to decide on how to award the different points, and then ask three strangers—people of Silvertown, I mean—to judge the contest."

"Mr. Remington!" repeated Marjorie. "Will he be there?"

Miss Phillips blushed. "There, now, I have said too much already. Suppose we say nothing more about it. It's time to go to bed, anyway."

The scouts did as the captain commanded, pausing only to put out the fire. They reserved further discussion of the subject of the matter until they were by themselves.

Early the next morning they were in their canoes again, ready to start off. This time Miss Phillips kept her map in view so that there could be no chance of a mistake; and she designated Frances Wright and Ethel Todd—the two oldest girls in the troop—to take the lead.

For the next few days they progressed steadily onward. Always on the water by nine o'clock, and pausing only an hour for lunch, they continued until four; then with the aid of the map, Miss Phillips watched for the best camping place.

All had gone well thus far; and by Saturday morning they were practically on schedule time.

"Have you ever been over this stream before, Captain?" asked Marjrie, as the canoes set off from the shore together.

"No, never," replied Miss Phillips.

"Well, then how did you know all about making the map, and the best sites for our camps, and——?"

The captain smiled. "Mr. Remington, the scoutmaster, took it once, and recommended it to me. It was he who made the maps for us."

"It certainly is lovely," observed Marjorie. "I couldn't ask for a more beautiful trip."

"And don't forget what awaits at the other end," put in Ruth, with a tone of joyous anticipation.

"Except for the water meet!" sighed Doris. "Do you know, Captain Phillips, the idea of our racing and doing all those stunts sort of scares me—before all those strange people, I mean. Do we all have to take part?"

"Oh, I wish you all would, though of course I wouldn't absolutely insist," replied Miss Phillips. "But really, nobody in Pansy troop need be afraid. Already I consider you really expert canoeists!"

"Thanks, Captain!" exclaimed Ethel Todd, well pleased at the compliment.

"But of course nobody stands a chance with Marj!" said Ruth, rather sulkily. "Because she has had so much experience."

"Experience isn't everything," said Miss Phillips. "It's deftness—a certain knack, which I can't explain."

The canoes were forced to go in single file now, for the stream had become very narrow. Miss Phillips and Frieda took the lead, the former watching cautiously for rapids; for it was somewhere near here, she thought, that a portage would be necessary. Ruth and Lily in the *Water-witch* were the last in the trail.

"I honestly don't think it's fair about Marj!" repeated the former, in discontent.

"Why, Ruth, of course it is! Marj isn't any professional, like you make her out to be! What don't you consider fair about it?"

Ruth paddled more slowly, in order to allow those in the canoe ahead to get out of hearing distance.

"Just this. I think the whole idea of a canoe meet is not Miss Phillips', but Marj's. Why should the captain have chosen the thing Marjorie Wilkinson is most proficient in? You can't tell me! It's because Marj paws around her, and makes her do just as she likes!"

"Ruth Henry!" cried Lily, furious at the slur against her best friend. "Are you serious?"

"Yes, I am, Lil. You're blinded by her; Marj can do anything with you that she likes, and you think she's wonderful. But other people don't think

so! She's not half good enough for you, I tell you." Ruth lowered her voice and spoke slowly in the hope that her words of flattery might make a deep impression upon the other. "You're the most popular girl in our class, Lily Andrews, and everybody knows it. But if you don't pay any attention to anybody except Marj, you'll lose all your friends!"

Lily was simply dumbfounded at the words of her companion. It was true that she always put Marjorie first, assuming that her room-mate was more popular than herself. And yet, as Ruth had reminded her, it was she who had been chosen president of the class, and not Marjorie.

"Now I think it's all very well to have tests like this Sailor's test, as a regular part of scouting," continued Ruth; "but when it comes to a big meet, which all Silvertown will witness, I don't think it's quite fair to select canoeing. Why shouldn't Miss Phillips have chosen tennis? We've never had a tennis tournament."

"But I thought it was our benefactor who suggested canoeing—not Miss Phillips."

"Well, I don't know, but I wish you'd help me this once. You know Miss Phillips hates me—" Ruth laughed carelessly, as if the fact did not cause her any unhappiness—"but she likes you, Lil. So you suggest a tennis match instead. Won't you please, Lil?"

"Well, tennis would suit me just as well—though

I'm not much good at either sport. Still, I do see what you mean. Yes—if I have a chance—maybe —I'll mention the matter to Miss Phillips!"

"Oh, Lil, you're an angel!" cried Ruth, in ecstacy.

All this time both girls had been so engrossed in the conversation that they had forgotten to paddle. Ruth, however, had continued to guide the canoe until she won Lily's consent to attack Miss Phillips on the subject; then she gave a little jump, and dropped her paddle in the water. She had not noticed that the stream had become swifter, and that there were sharp rocks ahead; with her mind still upon the recent conversation, she leaned far over the side of the canoe in order to secure the floating paddle. The canoe, however, driven by the current, swung around and hit against a protruding rock. An instant later, the girls were thrown under the water. The canoe had capsized.

"Lil, oh! Lil! Where are you?" called Ruth, as soon as her head came to the surface.

"Here!" sputtered Lily, her nose and mouth filled with water by the violent ducking. Then a series of violent chokes on her part prevented all hope of replying.

"Oh, where can the others be?" cried Ruth, grasping at the canoe in despair, and looking wildly about for help. But she saw no signs of the other girls; the *Water-Witch* had evidently been progressing more slowly than they had either of them realized.

With a desperate effort, they finally managed to turn the canoe about, and pushing it before them, they swam for the shore, which was close by. The water-proof bags containing rain-coats, blankets, and supplies were scattered in all directions, headed down stream.

"Lil, we've got to get our stuff—or it will sink so that we can't find it!"

"Oh! Oh! What shall we do!" wailed Lily, now able to speak. "Marj! Marj!" she screamed helplessly.

In a second two or three scouts appeared about fifty yards down stream, on the bank. They had already landed their canoes when they heard the cry of distress. But in an incredibly short time Marjorie had pushed hers in to the water again, and was paddling madly against the current towards the scene of the accident. Seeing, however, when she reached them, that Lily was perfectly safe, and with Ruth, capable of managing the capsized canoe, she turned about and rescued the bags of luggage.

By this time the rest of the party had run along the shore, reaching the scene just as Lily, with drenched clothing and streaming hair, climbed out of the water. Meanwhile Marjorie continued to fish for the lost articles.

"We're safe now. Pull her up, Lil!" called Ruth. "Hello, everybody! Weren't we crazy, though?"

"It's a swift part of the stream, and there are

lots of sharp rocks," explained Miss Phillips, after the scouts had pulled the canoe upon the bank and dumped out the water. "It is near here where we make our portage.' '

"Oh, no wonder! Well, Marj—" Ruth watched the other girl direct her canoe to the shore—"did you find everything?"

"I saw something or other sink to a watery grave," replied Marjorie; "and maybe I missed one or two little things. But I guess I got most everything."

"We'll have to make a grand drying-day," remarked Miss Phillips. "But there doesn't seem to be any good place to pitch our tents."

She looked around anxiously, but the banks on either side of the stream were sharply and thickly covered with trees. Suddenly she realized how still everything was; not a leaf was stirring, not a bird was singing. The girls, too, were absolutely quiet, as if awed by some approaching calamity. She glanced nervously at the sky; the sun was still shining brightly, but a glistening white cloud was rapidly rising out of the east, and increasing in size as it advanced higher into the heavens. A moment later, the sun was temporarily obscured. A distant rumble was heard. There was no doubt about it now; a heavy thunderstorm was approaching.

"We'll never get dry!" said Lily, dolefully. "Oh, Ruth, aren't you getting sort of cold? And with nothing but wet sweaters to put on——"

"Here's mine!" offered Alice, handing her sweater to Lily. "And I'll get Flo's for you, Ruth."

"Thanks!" murmured both girls, gratefully.

"Girls," said Miss Phillips, "I have decided not to attempt to put up tents now. Do you see that barn over there? I think we had better take out our bags and blankets, and turn our canoes upside down and make for shelter. Whoever owns it surely wouldn't put us out in the storm."

"Suits me to the ground!" said Lily.

When Marjorie unbarred the bolt of the heavy wooden door, the first big drops of rain were falling from the black cloud overhead. The rusty hinges creaked, and the door swung open, revealing an empty interior of huge proportions. The divisions of the stalls were still standing, and the floor of the loft was covered with straw. Although the place was deserted, everything was neat and clean.

"I'm just as glad we don't have to share our quarters with horses," said Alice.

"Or cows!" added Ruth.

"Let's hope nobody puts us out," said Miss Phillips. "As soon as the storm is over, I'll go and see if the house to which this belongs is occupied, for it would seem to me to be wiser to stay here all night than to pitch tents on wet ground. And especially on Lily's and Ruth's account."

"Oh, don't mind us," said Ruth. "We'll be all right."

"Well, suppose you select that stall over there as your boudoir, and put on dry clothing. If your own bloomers and middies are wet, borrow somebody else's. And a good rub with a Turkish towel wouldn't hurt."

The rest of the scouts climbed to the loft, and seated themselves on some straw near a window, so that they might watch the storm. Great claps of thunder followed sharp flashes of lightning, but the girls did not seem the least afraid. Indeed, several of them were sorry when the storm gave indication of subsiding.

"Will it be safe to make a fire outside the barn to cook something?" asked Frieda. "There's hardly any thing on hand that's good cold."

"Yes," replied the captain; "if we notice which side the wind is blowing from, and make it so the sparks blow away from the barn, and not towards it."

"Oh, here are some dry twigs and a few logs!" said Marjorie, who had descended the ladder again, and was making a tour of exploration. "Just the thing for a fire."

"Good!" cried Frieda. "Now I won't have to demonstrate my ability to make a fire from wet wood!"

The rain had entirely ceased now, and the sun was shining again. Marjorie and Alice offered to make the fire while Frieda prepared the supper.

Ruth and Lily spent their time rigging up a place to hang their wet clothing, and Florence and Miss Phillips went in search of water.

The fire had been blazing brightly for several minutes when a gruff, loud voice suddenly startled the girls from their pleasant conversation.

"Who's trying to burn my barn down?"

The girls crowded together fearfully, and Frances stood ready to face the angry owner; for, to their dismay, Miss Phillips was still out of sight.

"Please sir," Frances began, as soon as an old man appeared around the side of the barn, "we are being very careful. You see we made our fire away from the wind——"

"Oh, you did, eh? Well, suppose you put it right out again!"

Something in the old man's manner, gruff though it was, reminded Doris of her father, and hardly realizing what she was doing she put her hand on his sleeves, and looked beseechingly into his eyes.

"Please don't put us out!" she pleaded. "We're Girl Scouts, and we give you our word of honor ——"

At her words and her tone, the old man's anger subsided; she seemed so like a child, asking him for shelter and protection. No one could resist Doris Sands for any length of time.

"But my dear child—" he began.

A voice behind him interrupted his sentence. The captain had returned to the scene of action.

"Please accept my apologies," she said; and before he could reply, she told him the whole story.

"Why, I understand perfectly!" he said. "But can't you come up to the house instead, and I guess my wife can give you some supper?"

"Thanks," said Miss Phillips; "we shall be glad to accept your invitation. But so long as the girls have started supper, we may as well eat it."

"Then save up for dessert! I saw my wife making a cake this morning."

"Hooray!" exclaimed Alice. "We haven't had any home-made cake for an age!"

"And I'll see that the fire is entirely put out," concluded Miss Phillips, as the man turned to go.

"Doris, you certainly got around him nicely," remarked Ruth as they took their plates of beans into the barn to eat.

"Oh, country people are always nice," said Doris; "if you only understand them right."

"Do you think this is a big farm, Miss Phillips?" questioned Marjorie.

"I don't think it's a farm at all," replied the captain. "I think these old people live here by themselves, and probably raise a little garden for their own use. But if it were really a farm, this barn wouldn't be empty like this."

"That's true," agreed the girl.

The old people proved to be living just such a life as Miss Phillips had surmised. Kindly, hospitable, and simple-hearted, they made their guests quite at home and the girls enjoyed their evening, and the day that followed. For it was Sunday, and the old couple insisted that the girls accompany them to the country church and remain with them for dinner.

It was nearly three o'clock when the scouts made their adieux, and returned to seek their canoes, for Miss Phillips had decided that they would make the portage before setting up camp for the night.

"And we couldn't be more rested, or in better condition to carry heavy loads," said Miss Phillips, as they came upon the canoes lying just as they had left them, bright and shining after their washing in the rain.

"And now for the heavy work!" said Lily, tucking her luggage into the *Water-Witch.*

"Thank goodness for that chicken dinner!" added Ethel.

"So say we all!" echoed Marjorie.

CHAPTER VII

THE SAILOR BADGE

Two days later the scouts found themselves encamped in a locality where the stream was particularly wide. They were to remain there until the following afternoon in order that the girls who wished might qualify for the Sailor's Badge.

In their eagerness to pass their first-class test and thus become eligible for the trip to Washington the previous spring, the members of Pansy troop had given a little attention to the study for merit badges. Most of the girls had passed the Cook, Flower-finder, and the Needlewoman tests; and all of them on the present trip wore the Pioneer's badge. But for so energetic a troop, Miss Phillips felt almost as if this branch of the work had been neglected; for this reason, she placed more emphasis than ever upon the winning of the Sailor badge. And the girls were equally enthusiastic.

"There are two parts to this test: the first is a general test for everyone who aspires to proficiency in water sports, and the second part gives you a choice—in showing your ability to manage a row-

boat, a sail-boat, a canoe, or a motorboat. We shall of course all select the canoe."

"I've been looking at some of the questions," said Marjorie; "but I can't answer them. For instance, about the right of way, and the port and the starboard of boats, and——"

"Oh, that part is easy," said Miss Phillips; "I can tell you things like that. It's practical demonstrations that I'm afraid of. With the exception of Alice, you can all swim twenty-five yards with your clothing on——"

"Does that mean that I'm out of it?" cried the girl, in disappointment. "Why, I can paddle as well as the rest of the girls!"

"You may qualify for everything else except the swimming, and then do that on Silver Lake," said the captain. "Now, to continue—of course everybody knows the sixteen points of the compass and how to find the four directions from the sun or stars."

"I don't!" remarked Alice.

"Oh, Alice, of course you do!" Miss Phillips' voice sounded a trifle provoked. "Where does the sun rise, and how do you find the North star?"

"Well, I guess I do know," admitted the girl, meekly. "I spoke before I thought."

"Bad habit that," remarked Ruth.

"Now see whether you can answer these ques-

tions. If you were on a river at night, what color lights would you carry, and on which side?"

"A red and a green light," answered Marjorie, promptly; "but I don't know which side they are on."

"You show the red light on the port or left side and a green light on the starboard or right side," the captain informed them. "And these lights should show only towards the front and sides. In order to tell which way a boat is heading they carry a low white light on the bow which shines straight ahead, and another white light higher up in the stern which shows on all four sides. If you see a green light on the left and a red one on the right, with two white lights in the centre, one above the other, you will know that the boat is heading towards you. If you are coming up behind it, you will see only the white stern light."

"Which side do they pass on?" asked Lily. "Do they observe traffic rules, like automobiles, and pass to the right?"

"Whenever possible. But if your course should lie to the left you could signal two blasts of the whistle, which would mean that you were going to the left. One whistle means to the right. The first boat which signals is the one which lays the course to be followed, and the other boat should always answer with the same signal to show that they understand. If you don't understand the signals,

then blow four short blasts, which means danger, and the signals can be given and returned over again.

"Always watch the sky, so that you can be prepared in time to reach shore before a storm comes. You can easily tell rain clouds when you see them."

"Well, we've had one storm; let's hope that we won't have another," said Doris.

"Still, that didn't hurt us much," said Miss Phillips. "Listen," she continued, "here's a good one for Ruth and Lily: Why is it dangerous to move about or stand in a canoe?"

"We weren't standing!" protested Lily—"or even moving much! We were only talking."

"They must use their arms and hands like foreigners do when they talk!" said Ethel. "Maybe they stamped their feet for emphasis!"

"We didn't either!" denied Ruth. "We struck a rock, and that was all there was to it!" she concluded.

"Well, anyway, you've all had a practical illustration of the danger of it," said Miss Phillips.

Ruth began to be bored with this cross-examination; she had not been able to answer a sufficient number of questions herself to become interested. So she suggested that they postpone the rest of the examination until the following day.

"But we're just at the interesting part now," said Miss Phillips. "I mean about the canoe. And I thought if we discussed all the questions now, we

could take the written part of the test right after supper."

"All right," agreed Ruth.

Miss Phillips was surprised at the knowledge most of the girls showed in answer to her questions on the subject of canoeing. It was evident that they were thoroughly interested in the topic, and, before starting on their trip, had either consulted the libraries or had talked with experienced canoeists. As soon as supper was over they were eager to take the written examination, to make use of the light as long as it lasted. They all wrote at great length, working over and revising their papers until it was really too dark to see.

Lily Andrew was the first to hand her paper to Miss Phillips, who was in her own tent. Much as she hated to solicit favors, or to seem to dictate to her superior officer, she decided that she must do as Ruth had asked, for a promise is a promise, no matter to whom or under what circumstances it is made.

"Miss Phillips," she began, "some of the girls would like to have a tennis match—er—instead of a canoe meet. They think—that—that——"

"That what?" asked the captain, not knowing what to expect.

"That it is sort of having two prizes for the same thing. I mean the merit badge, and the cup, too!"

"A merit badge is not a prize in any sense of the word," contradicted the captain. "It is simply a

symbol of efficiency along a certain line. And the *other* prize you mention—the silver cup—was not suggested by me, but by the friend who is providing for this trip. It would be rude and out of place to seem to be dissatisfied with his generosity."

"Yes, I see," said Lily. She was beginning to feel very uncomfortable. "But tennis is so popular——"

"All right; perhaps we can arrange a tennis tournament after we get to Silvertown. We'll see. But not for a prize! Now will you run out and collect the papers, for the girls will ruin their eyes if they work any longer."

The next morning was spent in practicing with their canoes. They tried landing them, pushing them off, upsetting them, and righting them again, until, at eleven o'clock, Miss Phillips blew the whistle as a signal to begin the test.

"I'll take Frieda first," she said, "so that she can get dinner."

Frieda, Ruth, Marjorie, Ethel, and Frances all tried the practical part of the test and, to all appearances, were successful. Miss Phillips refused, however, to tell them the results until that evening.

Soon after the noon meal, their things were packed again, and they paddled all afternoon. At five o'clock they reached their campsite.

"I do hope you aren't going to be too tired for the scout meeting, this evening," said Miss Phillips.

"For I have a surprise for you. Something you will like!"

Three hours later, when the tired girls gathered around the camp fire, their faces were alight with anticipation. They enjoyed going over the brief, familiar ceremony at the opening; it gave them a new thrill to repeat the pledge, the laws, and the motto, and to sing the Star-Spangled Banner.

Miss Phillips gave a formal report of the money spent, and Frieda told what supplies she had on hand. Having dismissed the business, the captain reached into her pocket, and drew out a white envelope.

"Five Girl Scouts have passed the Sailor test, and are to receive merit-badges. I have the pleasure to present these badges tonight. Will the following girls please come forward: Marjorie Wilkinson, Frieda Hammer, Ruth Henry, Ethel Todd, and Frances Wright? The girls all did creditably, ranking in the order in which I have named them."

It had never occured to any of the girls that they might actually receive their merit badges on the trip, and the surprise was delightful. For every Girl Scout knows what a thrill it brings to sew an additional badge on the sleeve of her uniform, particularly when there are not many there already.

The lucky ones therefore jumped up happily and rushed forward, almost forgetting, in their haste, to give the captain the customary salute.

After the installation of the new lieutenant, the meeting was dismissed, and the girls went to their tents. Ruth Henry alone was dissatisfied; it was not enough for her to win the badge—she could not bear to have Frieda's and Marjorie's names lead hers on the list. This, she thought, was probably part of Miss Phillips's design.

She resolved to get even.

CHAPTER VIII

ADVENTURE ON AN ISLAND

"Our next camping spot," said Miss Phillips as the party started out the next morning, "will be an island. Keep watch for it, on the right, I think, for I am not quite sure of its location."

"A big island?" inquired Ruth. She had studied the map in detail, but she did not remember any large islands, or indeed any place where the stream would be wide enough to contain such a formation.

"Not very large," replied Miss Phillips. "But plenty big enough for our camp. There is a stream branching out somewheres to the right, which joins this again farther on, and in the middle is an island about a quarter of a mile long, with lots of shade trees. A very attractive spot, I believe."

"And do the Boy Scouts ever camp there?" asked Marjorie. It seemed to her that she could remember her brother Jack telling of such an experience.

"Yes; summer before last. And I believe a few other boys besides scouts went, too; so perhaps your brother was among them."

"It'll be fun to see if we can find any traces of them," remarked Ethel. "Or maybe we'll find treasure."

"Oh, all islands are reported to contain buried treasure," laughed Miss Phillips.

The girls continued to paddle straight ahead all morning. As the stream was swift and narrow, they did not attempt to eat their luncheon in their canoes, but pulled up to the shore and got out upon a large, flat rock which jutted out from the bank.

Ruth Henry was the first to finish eating. Jumping to her feet, she hurried down the bank to where her canoe lay and rummaged for her field-glasses.

"The creek seems to be getting wider down there," she said; "maybe I can see the island."

But although she looked carefully, and several of the others made attempts also, they could not distinguish anything which resembled an island. This was not strange, for it was necessary for them to paddle for three hours longer before they finally sighted it.

"There it is!" cried Ruth. "Oh, I think this is going to be lots of fun!"

The small island, not much wider than a city square, appeared most attractive with its shady trees, and sandy sloping shores. The girls put more energy into their strokes, that they might reach it more quickly. Marjorie was the first to pull her canoe to shore.

"I feel like Christopher Columbus!" she cried, darting forward to explore.

"We'll make it a game," said Miss Phillips, when

all the girls were out of their canoes, "to see who can find the most traces of civilization."

The girls discovered a little path leading towards the centre of the island, and followed it. After about two minutes' walk they found themselves in a clearing, and Ruth discovered the remains of a fire.

"This is the camping spot, anyway," said the captain; "so now suppose we go back for our supplies."

In a short time they were again started upon their tour of exploration. But there were no more paths, and the thickness of the undergrowth retarded their progress. A few birds fluttered at their approach, and Marjorie found the remains of a dead snake, but otherwise their expedition was uneventful.

"Not much excitement here," remarked Ruth, as they returned to their camping spot, somewhat disappointed.

"No, but it's a lovely place to be," put in Marjorie. "Why do you always want excitement, Ruth?"

"Oh, I can't stand anything slow!" she replied.

"Then see that you don't cause any more delays," said Miss Phillips, rather sharply. She had not forgiven Ruth for what she still considered a premeditated mistake in losing the way.

Ruth said nothing, but closed her lips tightly. She was very angry with Miss Phillips, and wished that she might do something to annoy her. She decided to think up a plan of action.

"If you put the tents up quickly," said the captain, "there ought to be time for a swim before supper. How about it, Frieda?"

"All right—if you don't stay too long. Please be here on the dot of six," she warned them, "not a minute later. We're going to have corn-fritters and maple syrup for supper!"

"Hurrah! That's worth working for!" cried Marjorie, as she lifted her shelter-half from the ground.

A few minutes later, all of the girls except Frieda and the captain had disappeared, clad in their bathing suits, through the trees that hid the water from the encampment. They skipped along as fast as they could, watching out to avoid the sharp rocks which might hurt their tender feet. One after another they reached the shore, and, plunging into the water, struck out for the deepest part.

"I'll race you across the stream, Marj!" challenged Ruth, anxious for adventure.

"Come on!" cried Marjorie.

"No, no, girls!" commanded Frances Wright, who, because of her commission as lieutenant, had been placed in charge. "There may be some springs of cold water out there farther that would give you cramps. Besides, there is so little time now. Wait till tomorrow."

Disappointed at these words, the girls swam slowly about, keeping close to the shore. It was getting

cooler now, and they did not want to stay in long. Marjorie stayed with Alice, helping her with her strokes for a short time; then they both decided to go back to camp.

"I believe I'll go too," said Ethel; and Lily and Doris joined the party.

"I'd like to go back, but I feel responsible," observed Frances; "Ruth, will you and Florence promise to do nothing rash if I leave you?"

"Cross my heart!" responded Ruth.

"All right; then I'm going. But don't wait too long!"

But when the rest of the girls gathered around the fire to enjoy Frieda's delicious corn fritters, neither of the girls had appeared.

"I almost think I ought to go down to the stream," said Miss Phillips, rising. But the sudden appearance of Florence Evans, completely dressed, reassured her.

"Where's Ruth?" she demanded.

"She's all right; she'll be up soon. She wanted to practice the Australian Crawl, and I couldn't get her away. But she said she'd be up soon."

Miss Phillips looked annoyed. Why must Ruth always do something different from the others? And why should she always be so inconsiderate? The captain glanced slyly at Frieda; but the girl did not seem to resent the thoughtlessness of the other in keeping her back.

They were almost through with supper, when Ruth, dripping wet, emerged from among the trees.

"I humbly apologize!" she cried; "but I simply made up my mind that I wouldn't stop till I got that stroke, and I succeeded!"

If Ruth expected applause at her announcement she was disappointed, for no one passed even a comment. Miss Phillips made no effort to hide her irritation.

"Hurry, Ruth," she said, "if you want any supper. It's selfish to keep Frieda waiting!"

Ruth disappeared into her tent with a pout on her face. Always Frieda, or Marjorie, or somebody else that the captain seemed to be concerned about—anybody but her! Then she smiled at the little secret trick she had played upon them. Miss Phillips was too cock-sure of herself; she never had anyone cross her! Well, perhaps in the morning she would find something to her distaste!

After the supper things had been cleared away, Marjorie suggested that they get their canoes and go out on the water. Ruth was the first to voice an opposition.

"I'm too tired!" she protested. "But you can all go, for I'm not a bit afraid to stay here alone."

"No," said Miss Phillips; "I think we will all stay here tonight; it will be safer. And we can have a little stunt night like the one we had that time at camp."

The evening passed quickly and pleasantly; by nine o'clock the girls were all in bed, and soon afterwards, asleep. Ruth was the last to close her eyes, and the first to open them in the morning.

But she did not get up immediately; she lay still, contemplating the very agreeable adventure which was about to take place. As soon as she heard the others stir, she too began to dress.

"I hope we can make a quick get-away," remarked Lily, as she adjusted her tie. "It always seems to make Captain Phillips so happy when we make an early start."

Ruth said nothing, but whistled softly to herself, succeeding, by the display of indifference, to intimate to her companion that the captain's happiness was not her one and only desire in life.

As the girls left their tent, they heard their officer's voice.

"Somebody please volunteer to get water. You found the spring yesterday, you remember, down near the edge of the bank by the stream."

"I'll go!" called Alice Endicott, ever ready to be obliging.

"So will I," chimed in Marjorie, joining the other girl and running with her towards the water.

"Where are the canoes?" asked Marjorie, as soon as they had reached the bank. "Wasn't it about here that we left them?"

The girls stopped short and gazed up and down

the stream, scanning the banks on both sides. The canoes were nowhere in sight!

"Marj!" exclaimed Alice, aghast, "can I be dreaming about the time we went for your canoe, and couldn't find it—or are they really gone?"

"It's impossible!" protested Marjorie. "Oh, Alice, surely we're mistaken!"

But as in their previous experience, their first fears were correct. Walking to a point on the shore which projected far into the water, they looked searchingly in every direction; but they saw nothing except the water, the line of the shore, and the wall of trees on either side. Could this be the work of thieves?

Forgetting all about their pails of water, they ran as fast as they could back to the camp, and shouted their news as soon as they were within hearing distance. For they felt that not a moment was to be lost.

Frieda dropped the pan of biscuits she was carrying, and Miss Phillips looked at the girls as if she thought them crazy. And then the scouts began to ask them breathless, excited questions.

"Could we starve to death, Captain?" demanded Doris, nervously.

But Miss Phillips, now perfectly self-controled, laughed good naturedly.

"Hardly," she replied. "First of all, everybody, except Alice, and possibly yourself, Doris, could

swim to the mainland and bring a boat for the others. Secondly, although we do not have a great deal of food, we could really live for a long time on what we have. And third, this is not a lonely spot,—there are sure to be boats passing occasionally. But the loss of the canoes themselves,—I guess we could make the rest of the trip to Silvertown by train or trolley—would mean a good deal to the members of Pansy troop."

"But how do you suppose they got away?" asked Ruth. "Could thieves——?"

"No," said Miss Phillips; "it is all my fault for not insisting upon tying them in some way. Evidently the stream has a slight tide, like a miniature ocean, and they have simply been washed out and down stream. Yet, I was sure we had pulled them up far enough upon the banks. But the current is not so very fast; perhaps we can catch them."

"What with?" asked Marjorie. "Are we going to stop and build a raft?"

"No, no!" laughed Miss Phillips; "we'll swim after them."

"Oh, Captain, I could never do that! Oh, what shall we do?" wailed Alice, helplessly.

"First of all, obey your scout law: *A Girl Scout is cheerful.* Next, eat your breakfast that Frieda has prepared for you. And that reminds me, where is the water, Marjorie?"

The girl started guiltily. "We forgot it!" she admitted. "But we'll go back."

"Very well; then hurry!"

The warm, wholesome food revived the scouts' spirits, and they discussed the proposition more hopefully.

"Ruth, you wanted adventure," remarked Miss Phillips; "now you're getting it."

The girl looked down at her plate, and smiled mysteriously.

"I wonder if any of us really will find the canoes," said Marjorie.

"Whoever does will be a real heroine!" exclaimed Ruth, thus, as it were, arranging the stage for her own complete triumph.

"Well, we'll each do something," said the captain. "As soon as your breakfast is digested, we'll organize into squads. Let me see——"

She paused for a moment, looking thoughtfully around the group.

"Doris—and Alice—and Frances are to stay at camp," she announced slowly. "Ruth you and I will swim the shortest way to the main-land to look for help. Marjorie and Ethel may swim over and explore all around the farther shores of this creek, looking for nooks in the bank where the canoes may have drifted; and Lily and Florence may take this side. Frieda, I would like you to start with us; for you are such a strong swimmer

you could investigate the creek a distance if necessary."

"But why don't you take Marjorie with you too?" asked Ruth, obviously dissatisfied with the plans. "She's a better swimmer than I am!"

"I wanted to give you a chance to earn the glory," replied Miss Phillips.

"Oh, no, do let Marjorie——"

"I have placed you, Ruth; and you are all to obey my orders. They are final!"

Ruth turned away crestfallen. For some reason unknown to the girls, she was not nearly so eager for the adventure as they would have expected her to be. The others all chafed at the hour of idleness their captain insisted upon enforcing, before starting upon their search. By nine o'clock, all but the scouts designated to remain at camp were in their bathing-suits, ready to take the plunge.

Marjorie was eager for the undertaking. She stood on the shore, one foot dipped into the water, anxiously awaiting the signal for departure. At the first sound of the whistle she was in the stream, swimming with a long, even stroke for the opposite shore. Ethel Todd was by her side.

"I do hope somebody finds them!" she called, as she brought her head out of the water. "But I guess we won't be the ones to do it!"

"No, it will probably be the girls who went down stream—with Miss Phillips!"

"Then I hope it's Frieda, and not Ruth! She has a swelled head already."

"Right you are!" agreed Ethel.

They swam silently for several minutes, making good progress. As they neared the opposite shore they perceived how thick the undergrowth was, close to the shore.

"The boats could be hidden there," observed Ethel.

"But hardly, unless somebody hid them!" objected Marjorie. "Because we're not swimming with the current, Ethel."

"No, we aren't! I hadn't thought of that."

They were almost at the opposite bank now, but they saw no signs of canoes.

"Tired yet?" asked Ethel. "Shall we go ashore?"

"Not unless you want to," replied Marjorie.

"Then let's swim along the bank, and look closely for them."

The girls swam leisurely; the motion was no greater effort for them than walking. They had hardly gone fifty yards, however, before Marjorie caught sight of something shining under a group of low bushes. With a cry, she rushed forward. To their infinite joy they found, securely caught in the branches, the five bright, green canoes!

"And the paddles are in them!" commented Ethel, as each girl climbed into a canoe. "Oh, Marj, don't you wish we could take all five back at once?"

"Yes, but we'll get the others at camp to go back with us," said Marjorie; "and we won't blow the whistle till we have them all."

In a short time the girls at the camp had heard the news, and Alice and Doris volunteered to go back with them to get the other canoes. Then, with a great blast of the whistle, they summonded the other searchers. It was half an hour, however, before everyone gathered at the shore.

"Ethel and Marjorie are the heroines!" cried Lily, triumphantly, after they had all heard the story.

"No, Marjorie is!" protested Ethel, modestly. "It was she who found them."

Ruth looked annoyed. The irritation she had caused her captain was offset by the triumph Marjorie had gained; and she had to admit to herself that her trick was a failure.

But Miss Phillips took all the blame upon herself.

CHAPTER IX

BACK TO CIVILIZATION

More than a week had gone by since the girls had left their homes; by this time they were quite accustomed to the peaceful routine of the trip. Indeed it seemed to Marjorie as if they had been gone much longer.

During all this time they had not visited a town, and they slept under a roof only one night. But they did not mind the separation from civilization for a temporary period; it entailed no hardship to these nature-loving girls. Perhaps their greatest regret was that it was not possible for them to receive any mail.

By Wednesday afternoon, however, Miss Phillips expected to reach Rikers. There it was possible that some of the girls might find letters awaiting them at the Post Office.

"Now we'll find out who are our really popular girls!" said Ruth, when they were near enough to the town to distinguish a church spire in the distance. She was confident that she would find at least two letters—one from her mother and one from Harold

—so she knew that she was safe in making the remark.

"I won't get any," observed Marjorie. "I forgot to tell mother we expected to stop there. How about you, Doris?"

"I don't know," replied the girl, carelessly. "But I do know that we've got some water in our canoe. Do you see that, Marj?"

Marjorie turned sharply around—she had been "resting up" in the bow—and looked at the bottom of the canoe. Doris was right; there was about an inch of water.

"Water?" echoed Ruth, who had overheard the remark. "Don't you know it's a sign af a very poor boatsman to splash water into the boat?"

"Maybe it is," admitted Marjorie; "nevertheless, it's there. And I do believe it's getting deeper. Look!"

Miss Phillips paddled close at these words and peered anxiously into the *Will-o-the-Wisp*.

"It's a leak!" she decided. "Evidently you have grazed a jagged rock or a tree-stump."

"Can it be fixed?" asked Doris, hastily making for the shore.

"Oh, yes, quite easily," replied the captain. "But since we are so near to Rikers, we might as well have it repaired there, for a real repair man would have more tools than we carry."

Marjorie and Doris directed the *Will-o-the-Wisp*

to the shore and got out while the others went a short distance farther down toward the regular place. Miss Phillips opened a box and took out five padlocks with chains.

"We will put these on here," she said. "If I only had used the precaution to do this on the island, we wouldn't have had all that needless worry and loss of time."

"But it was exciting, you know," argued Ruth. "Besides I can't see why you are in such an awful hurry, Captain. The meet is still a week off!"

"Yes, I know it is; nevertheless, it is too good an opportunity for pleasure for us to miss a day at Silvertown. I should think you would be one of the first to realize that, Ruth."

Ruth said nothing; she did realize what a wonderful thing it would be to spend ten days at Silvertown. And yet she wanted to delay the canoe trip, for she knew to her dismay, that she was not making the progress she had hoped for. At a little trial race which they had arranged the preceeding day, Marjorie had come in far ahead. Ruth was next, and Frieda close behind her; but none of the other girls gave her any cause for worry. She knew that she had endurance, and her ability to rescue a capsized canoe was really commendable. She even felt that putting forth a mighty effort, she might possibly be able to beat Marjorie, but it was very doubtful. And she knew that a mere presence

of a leak in her canoe would not keep her opponent out of the race; for Marjorie could handle one canoe as well as another. At last, therefore, she made her decision: as a final resort, she would summon Harold Mason to her assistance. She would put the plan they had conceived of together to a test!

As soon as Miss Phillips had locked the boats, and the girls had packed up the supplies which they did not care to leave in them, they all started for the town. It proved to be a surprisingly short walk; within a few minutes they had reached the main street, and were gazing into the windows of the shops as if they had not seen a store for months.

"I think we shall put up at a little inn called the Green Tree," said Miss Phillips. "I have heard it is very nice, and the rest will do you girls good. Particularly Frieda—" she added—"she needs a rest from cooking."

"But let's go to the Post Office first!" pleaded Ruth. "I could never rest until I find out whether there is any mail."

"Well, then, Ruth, suppose you and Lily go for the mail—you will have to inquire where the Post Office is—while the rest of us go to the inn. Do you see that green and white house on the next street —on the corner? Well, that's it."

"We won't get lost!" cried Ruth, joyfully seizing

Lily's hand. "See you again in five minutes!" she added.

As the weary girls approached the inn they found its aspect most inviting. Evidently the structure itself was very old; the low, rambling, white building reminded them of the Revolutionary period. A wide lawn extended in front of the house, and to the left of the walk was an immense shade tree.

"It isn't hard to know where the inn got its name, is it?" said Miss Phillips, nodding in the direction of the big maple; "and isn't it a beautiful tree!"

"If the 'inn' proves to be as nice as the outside," said Ethel, attempting a pun, "I'll be satisfied."

The interior disclosed a central hall, with a reception room on either side. One of these was attractively furnished as a parlor; the other was obviously the office. Into the door of the latter Miss Phillips therefore entered.

"Five nice rooms on the second floor!" announced the clerk, in answer to Miss Phillips's request. "I think you ought ter like 'em, too!"

"Is the house very old?" asked Marjorie, as they ascended the broad curved staircase.

"Yes, very. George Washington stayed here one night, on his way to Philadelphia."

"Of course he did," laughed Doris. "But say—is it haunted?"

"I reckon!" answered the man.

A moment later he flung open two or three doors

and disclosed the bedrooms. There the girls beheld four-poster beds, Colonial rag rugs, and snowy curtains at the windows.

"It's lovely!" exclaimed Miss Phillips. "We certainly ought to have a real rest. Now—" she waited for the clerk to depart—"has anybody any preference as to rooms? Select whichever you like."

"All right," agreed Frances; "but let's all stay together for a minute—till Ruth and Lily come back with the mail."

"A real bed!" exclaimed Marjorie, removing her shoes and throwing herself upon it. "It does seem like luxury now, doesn't it?" she remarked.

"And such a lot of space to dress in!" added Doris.

"And *hot* water for a bath!" put in Ethel.

The girls were indeed tremendously elated over the prospect of hot baths, leisurely dressing, and a dinner which they did not need prepare or clear away. For fifteen minutes they lay on the beds, chatting happily, and resting. So absorbed were they in their conversation, that they did not notice their captain's absence until she returned.

"I have phoned about your canoe, Marjorie," she said, upon entering. "A very nice sounding voice told me that it could be fixed by tomorrow morning. I sent the key up by the servant."

Marjorie jumped up guiltily at the words of her officer.

"Oh, Miss Phillips, I'm sorry," she apologized; "I ought to have done it myself. But——"

"Never mind," laughed the captain. "It wasn't really any trouble. And I'm glad it's arranged. Now all you have to do is to enjoy yourselves."

Their conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Ruth and Lily. Their hands were filled with letters, and their eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"Did I get any?" cried Alice, jumping up at their entrance and rushing towards them.

"Everybody got some," answered Ruth. "Even Marj, who pretended nobody knew her address!"

"I can't imagine who—" she began, as Lily tossed the letter into her hands. Then, upon recognizing John Hadley's handwriting, she became silent. But how he had found out the address was a mystery to her, and she was too shy to ask questions and run the risk of being teased.

"You got lots of mail, didn't you, Miss Phillips?" observed Ruth.

The captain looked up smiling. "Yes, I received a lovely letter from the people who are responsible for this trip," she replied.

"People!" echoed Lily. "I thought it was a man!"

"It is—but he happens to have a wife. It is she who wrote to me."

"Curses!" cried Ruth, melodramatically. "And here I've been setting my cap for our rich friend—

thinking all the time that he surely was a bachelor."

"Well, I'm afraid you'll get left then," laughed Miss Phillips. "For he has a daughter about your age."

"A daughter!" repeated Marjorie. "Do we know her?"

"Y-e-s,—I believe you have all met her."

"Is she a Girl Scout?"

"I believe she is."

Lily and Marjorie both grew tremendously excited. "A member of Pansy troop?" asked the latter.

"That would be telling!" This last was uttered mysteriously; and the girls knew from their captain's manner that she would give them no further information.

When the scouts appeared in the dining room, all in uniform, they created quite a sensation among the other guests at the inn. The people looked up pleasantly as they passed, and one woman even came over to the captain to request a demonstration of scouting at the local church, an invitation which Miss Phillips was forced to decline on account of lack of time.

All this while Ruth was scheming how to get away from the others to send her telegram to Harold. She regretted now that she had not seized the opportunity when she was with Lily; it would have been easier than after supper with all the others around.

The girls sat on the porch until nearly dusk,

when Miss Phillip ssuggested that they go to the movies.

"At least, if they have a theatre," added the captain. "Alice, will you run and ask the clerk?"

In a moment the girl returned with an affirmative answer, and the whole crowd started off in the direction indicated by the clerk. The absence of trolley cars, the lack of congested traffic of any kind, made the town seem almost as quiet to the girls as the woods where they usually spent their evenings. After walking along for some minutes in silence, Lily Andrews first spoke. She stopped suddenly, right in the middle of the block, overcome by a serious thought.

"Captain Phillips!" she exclaimed abruptly, "how can we ever stay at Silvertown for ten days with nothing but our uniforms, a clean middy, and a change of underclothing?"

She uttered the last word so loudly that Miss Phillips had to caution her that it might prove embarrassing if a passer-by should hear her.

"I wondered that no one asked that question before," she replied. "But I will put your minds at rest. Each girl will find a suit-case filled with her prettiest dresses and daintiest lingerie already there. I arranged with your mothers to pack them."

"How wonderful!" cried Marjorie, seizing her captain's arm ecstatically. "You always think of everything, don't you, Miss Phillips!"

Inside the small picture-palace, they found that they could hardly refrain from laughing and talking. But they made a great effort to be quiet until they were out on the street again.

"How about ice-cream?" suggested Lily. "I'll treat the crowd."

"Fine!" agreed the girls.

Ruth, however, excused herself. "I want to stop over at the Post Office and send mother a telegram," she said, "just to let her know I'm all right."

"But wouldn't a picture post-card be better?" asked Marjorie. "We can get them at the drug store, and a telegram might scare her."

"No, she expects a telegram," replied Ruth firmly.

The girl was truthful in one respect; she did send a telegram. However, it was not addressed to her mother, but to Harold Mason, and it contained only the word "NOW," and was signed, "R. H."

"And *now*," she chuckled, as she traced her way back to the inn—"and now the real excitement begins!"

CHAPTER X

THE FORD TO THE RESCUE

Ever since his return from Princeton in June, Harold Mason had spent part of each day with his fair neighbor, Ruth Henry. More or less of a stranger in town, and having been away at college for four months, he had not formed any deep friendships with the young men of his own age. It was true that Jack Wilkinson had been fairly chummy with him, including him often among his crowd, in which Harold had always had a good time; but he had singled out no individual for his especial friend. Perhaps Ruth Henry was largely the cause of this.

For the young people had spent as much time together as Mrs. Henry would permit, and as Ruth would spare away from Jack Wilkinson, with whom the old boy and girl friendship still persisted, in spite of the many disturbances between the former and Jack's sister, Marjorie.

Ruth and Harold had played tennis together almost every day, had sometimes gone for walks, and had taken a "spin" almost every evening after supper. The boy was deeply infatuated with his

spirited young companion; now that she was away, he missed her most frightfully. He sometimes thought of looking for a summer job, but the hope that Ruth might telegraph to summon him to her aid prevented him. He wanted to be free to go the instant he received word. It was his dream day and night that she would want him, that he would be able to carry out the plan they had secretly plotted and that Ruth would win the meet at Silvertown. Perhaps she would be so overjoyed with his cleverness that she would obtain permission to invite him to Silvertown over the week end! He would take his Ford Sedan, and it would be the only car among the crowd; he would be the most popular of young men, and Ruth, seeing how the others admired him, would be proud to claim him as her particular friend!

It was, therefore, with a thrill of joy that he received the telegram and opened it to read the brief message. His eyes lit up instantly; then, glancing at his father who was awaiting the news, he stuffed the yellow paper into his pocket.

"A peach of an invitation from Miles Carter!" he exclaimed. "A stag house-party! By Jupiter, I'm glad I'm not working—and have to miss it!"

The explanation was, of course, made up on the spot; even the name was fictitious. Harold had just finished reading a book with such a character, and it was the first name that popped into his head.

"When does it begin?" asked Mrs. Mason, who had just entered the room in time to hear the story.

"Tomorrow, in time for dinner; Miles said last May that this might come off, if he could get a certain bungalow. But he said he wouldn't know ahead of time, so he'd have to wire."

The boy smiled in satisfaction at his ingenious explanation; it certainly was not a bad extemporaneous one. He was trying to decide where to locate the party, when the very question was put by his father.

"Where is it to be?"

"Atlantic City!" he replied without the slightest hesitation.

"Can I help you pack?" suggested his mother.

"No, thanks," said Harold, hastily, rather alarmed at the idea. His plan necessitated a complete disguise, and he had no desire for his mother to catch a glimpse of it.

"Going in the car?" asked his father.

"Sure, Mike!"

Once in his room he bolted the door and unlocked a big wooden chest which was beneath his bed. Then he drew out a bedraggled grey wig, with a beard and mustache to match, a complete make-up outfit, a mussed shirt and celluloid collar, a red necktie, a suit with baggy trousers, and a pair of old man's shoes.

"Pshaw, I forgot a hat!" he muttered. "Wouldn't

my spick and span Panama look ridiculous with this rig!"

He sat down on the edge of the bed to think. At last he decided upon his own grey felt, which he thought he could twist so out of shape as to make it look appropriate.

Next he packed these things, and locking all his dress and sport clothing in the wooden chest in the effort to deceive his mother into thinking he had taken them, he began to count his money. Fortunately, Harold Mason had his own bank account; for he could not guess just how much money he might need, and it would have been embarrassing indeed to have to ask his father for some, and have to make up other fictitious explanations.

He made all his preparations, for he intended to start early Thursday morning. And by six o'clock he was on his way, his disguise in the suitcase in the back of the machine, and his copy of the map in his pocket. The road was good, and he knew the country well; there was no cause for delay. The distance covered by the canoes, slowly following the winding course of the stream, was made with great rapidity in the car. By noon he had reached the town from which Ruth had sent the telegram.

Although Harold's mother had packed him some sandwiches, the boy was almost starved, and he made immediately for the only hotel in the town—the little Green Tree Inn.

He had hardly entered the door, when a servant approached him.

"Mr. Harold Mason?" he inquired.

Harold stopped, amazed. How could anyone here know his name?

"Yes," he replied.

"One of the young ladies left a letter here for you," the boy said, producing an envelope from his pocket.

While Harold ate his dinner he read Ruth's letter, which went into the minutest details. It was a friendly, intimate letter, telling just where they expected to camp that night—which was in reality by the old mill, just opposite to the farm where, according to old Michael's rumor, the weak-minded woman lived by herself.

After Harold had paid his bill, and sat smoking, he counted the money in his pocket. Besides his bills and usual currency, he had been careful to bring along two gold pieces, for he knew that gold, above all other kinds of money, would prove attractive to ignorant people.

Consulting his map, and comparing it with the details in Ruth's letter, he saw he had only about seven miles to go. He was therefore in no hurry; there would be no action until the following morning. Indeed, he finally decided to spend the afternoon at Rikers and to get his supper there, and not start for the farm house until after seven o'clock.

He would proceed leisurely until within five miles of the farm; then stop, pull down the curtains of the car, put up his mirror, and don his disguise. Then he would go on to the farm.

It was nearly nine o'clock when an old man, with shaggy grey hair and beard, and a dingy suit covered by an old dust-coat, arrived at the farm in his machine. He found the woman alone, just as Michael had said, but she did not appear feeble-minded. Thought ignorant and uneducated, she seemed to possess all of her faculties. She was large and stout, and looked quite capable of taking care of a small farm with her own hands. And, as far as he could tell in the dark, the place seemed well kept.

Harold got out of his machine slowly, as he thought a man of his years should walk, and lifted his hat. The woman was seated on the porch, rocking and resting.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he drawled, in a disguised voice, "but hev you happened to see a bunch of gals about yere any place?"

The woman looked him all over before replying. Deciding that he was evidently from the country—one of her own kind—she answered:

"Yes, sir; they's a bunch of them acrost the stream yonder, campin' out in tents. They come before sundown this evenin'."

"Sho! Hev any of them been over yere yet?"

"No. I ain't seen them close."

"Wal, listen," said Harold, lowering his voice to a whisper, "Here's a piece o' news! one o' them gals has run away—from her pap! And he's a rich man, and has offered a good reward to them as ketches 'er. The gal's name is Margie Wilkison. If you and me could ketch 'er—see—" he jingled his money in his pockets—"we'd go fifty-fifty! Huh?"

The woman regarded him for a moment distrustfully. "I don't know about that," she said doubtfully. "How can I believe you?"

Harold took a five dollar gold piece out of his pocket, and held it alluringly close to her, so that she might see it in spite of the darkness.

"This is yours—and more later," he said, "if you promise to help me all you can. I don't mean to harm the gal in any way; I jest want 'a keep 'er a prisoner yere till we get word to her pap. Then—maybe—five hundred a piece fer you and me!"

The woman could not resist such a tempting offer; her eyes sparkled in the darkness, and she seized the gold piece with greedy hands.

"Sure you ain't doin' no kind o' kidnappin'?" she asked sharply.

"I give you my word of it!" he replied solemnly. "But remember, whatever I say, you must pertend to her is true. For instance—you and me pertend to be married. You treat me like your old man! And can I sleep in the loft of your barn?"

"I reckon!" answered the woman. "Want sumpthin' to eat?"

"No, thanks; I had my supper."

"How' bout a nice ripe peach? My peaches is supposed to be the best in this here township."

"Don't care if I do," replied Harold, and he followed her into the kitchen.

They sat for a while, talking, Harold leading his accomplice to tell him about the farm and the surrounding country. After about half an hour's chat, they came back to the subject in question.

"And how do you expect to get the girl over here?" asked the woman. "Go across and steal her?"

Harold laughed unguardedly, showing his regular, white teeth, which would have been almost a miracle for one of his assumed age. However, the oil lamp gave a dim light and the woman was unobserving; the incident passed without any notice. But the boy realized that he must take more precaution in the presence of the young people.

"I expect her to come over yere," he explained, "probably for milk, or butter, or something. And if she does, you invite her into the kitchen, and I'll bolt the doors. Get an upstairs room ready, and of course I'll continue to occupy the barn as long as the gals stay. There will be no scandal, no danger; you can assure yourself o' that. All I want is the

money. And remember—if we get it, it's half yours!"

Not long afterwards, he pumped himself a bucket of water, put his car into an unoccupied part of the barn, and crept up to his straw to bed. Though the floor was hard, Harold slept well; he was having a great adventure; and best of all, he was going to make it possible for Ruth to win her heart's desire.

CHAPTER XI

IN QUEST OF PEACHES

When the Girl Scouts finished their ice-cream, they sat for a few minutes in the little drug store at Rikers, waiting for Ruth to return from her errand,

"She certainly is a devoted daughter," remarked Alice, as she directed, with a spluttering, overworked pen, a souvenir postal to her mother. "I never would think of sending a telegram!"

"Ruth's an only child," explained Lily; "and it makes a difference, I can tell you."

"But you didn't send your parents a telegram, Lil!" put in Marjorie.

"No—they're away, somewhere. But I do write often."

Tired of waiting for Ruth, the girls started toward the inn, and met her almost at the steps. They were glad of the opportunity to go to bed early that they might make a good start in the morning.

"And today's Thursday, remarked Miss Phillips, as they left the inn before seven o'clock the following morning. "I think we ought to make it by Saturday night. I sent a postal announcing our arrival for then, anyhow."

"And to whom did you announce it?" asked Ruth,

hoping to catch her captain unawares and cause her to give away the secret. But Miss Phillips only smiled knowingly.

"This is the earliest start we have made yet," she said; "but then we had no breakfast to cook, or tents to take down."

The girls paddled steadily all day. At last they came in sight of the big mill which Miss Phillips had designated as their camping spot. Ruth, however, was less interested in that than in the farm near by; for, sure enough, it was there, only instead of being opposite the mill, it was on the same side of the stream, a little farther down.

She had never confided to the other scouts the rumors that Michael had repeated about the woman who lived there. Indeed, she scarcely believed them herself, for she knew that gossiping people usually build stories about lonely, isolated lives. Nor had she any desire to frighten the girls; on the contrary she wanted to get Marjorie—and Frieda, if possible—to visit the farm. She resolutely kept all her information to herself. Only Harold Mason shared her knowledge.

Once she was sure of the farm, her next problem was how to get Marjorie there on some ordinary pretext. But she did not have to think hard; the difficulty practically solved itself. Before their very eyes, as they passed by, loomed a whole orchard of magnificent peaches—just about ripe! To the

scouts, who had eaten little except dried fruit since they had left home, the display was most alluring. And Ruth lost no opportunity in mentioning them at every chance, in order to make the girls' mouths water all the more.

Accordingly, the next morning, soon after breakfast, she remarked,

"I've simply got to have some of those peaches! Captain couldn't Marj and I paddle back to that farm-house and buy some for the rest of the trip? Our supplies aren't very heavy now, are they?"

Miss Phillips considered; it was Friday. Even if the weather continued favorable and conditions good, they could not reach their destination before Saturday night. So here were two days left to the journey; and girls can eat a lot in two days. It was true, too, as Ruth said, that their baggage was light. So, for all these reasons Miss Phillips gave her consent to Ruth's proposal, cautioning her, however, not to buy too many.

"I'll give you a dollar out of the fund," she said; "and you may buy as much as you can for that."

Ruth and Marjorie jumped up in great glee, and made haste to go and load their canoe. The others lingered a little.

"We better go in *Will-o-the-Wisp,*" said Ruth. "Doris, will you go with Lilian in *Water-Witch?*"

"Certainly, replied the girl, pleasantly. "Anything to get some of those peaches!"

"Don't wait for us to come back here!" called Ruth; "we'll paddle on, and meet you later. We can't get lost; if we're too speedy for you," she added laughingly, "we'll meet you at the next camp site—up by the bend!"

"Well, don't eat all the peaches!" called Ethel, as they started off.

But Ruth was not yet satisfied; she had no intention of going to the farm herself. She knew she must, in some way, contrive to substitute Frieda for herself. Before they reached the bank, she stopped short.

"Hang it all!" she exclaimed, apparently annoyed. "I've got a nail in my shoe."

"Shall I go get the hammer?" suggested Marjorie.

"No—I'd better go, for if I can't get it out, I'll have to get the sneakers out of our bag. But say, this means delay. Could you go for the peaches by yourself?"

"All right; certainly."

"No, you better not, either," decided Ruth, pretending to be very solicitous about Marjorie's welfare; "you'd better get another girl. Ho—Frieda!"

Frieda appeared in a second, accepted the explanation, and took Ruth's place. The latter returned to the group of scouts, now ready to depart, and made elaborate pretense at fixing an imaginary nail in her shoe. The operation, however, seemed to be quickly

performed; in less than five minutes the scouts had pushed off, with now only four instead of five canoes in the party.

Meanwhile, Marjorie and Frieda made for the opposite direction. Arriving at their destination before the remainder of the party had even started, they tied their canoe securely to a tree-trunk, and walked towards the farm-house.

"I hope whoever lives there doesn't bite our heads off," observed Marjorie.

Looking all around, they saw no one in sight, and proceeded towards the front door.

"Don't go to the front door, Marj!" said Frieda, stopping suddenly. "Country people always use their kitchens most of all. Let's go there!"

Accordingly, they passed around to the rear of the house. Peering through the screen door of the kitchen, they beheld an attractive interior—neat and clean and well kept. At the far corner, beside the stove, they distinguished the stout figure of a woman bending over a pan. Marjorie knocked timidly.

"Come in!" called the woman, cheerily. Then, turning around, she opened her eyes wide in amazement at the sight of the two young girls.

"How do you do?" said Marjorie pleasantly, as she and Frieda entered the big room. "We belong to the girls who camped last night a little way up the stream, and we want to know whether you will

sell us a dollar's worth of peaches. They looked delicious."

The woman smiled with pleasure. A workman loves to hear praise of his achievements, and the peach orchard was this lonely woman's one happiness and pride. For the moment, she forgot the part she was to play in her sheer delight at the compliment.

"Yes, I growed them all myself. Been livin' here nigh on to thirty year—" she was about to say, "by myself" but caught herself in time, and added, "me and my husband. And if I do say it myself, it's a fine crop of peaches I've got. I never have no trouble sellin' them."

"And do you do all the work yourself?" questioned Frieda. "Doesn't your husband help you?"

The woman shook her head. "No, he runs the car into Besley and other towns and sells 'em, but I do all the growin'. He never seemed to have no luck. But set down a minnit, and I'll give you some doughnuts and fresh milk."

"Thanks," said Marporie, gratefully. "But I almost think we oughtn't to be so far behind the others——"

"But it will take a while to pick the peaches," interruped the other; "and you might as well be restin' and a refreshin' yourselves. Set down!"

The girls laughed good naturedly, and seated themselves upon a long wooden box which was

evidently used for kindling. Just as they were handed their refreshments, an old man shuffled into the room.

"Jim, these girls wants some peaches," said the woman. "Will you go out and pick them a basket?"

"A dollar's worth," explained Marjorie, biting into her doughnut.

The man nodded his head slowly, and then turned around and carefully closed the wooden door and bolted it.

"First of all," he drawled, "will you answer me one question. Be either of yez by any chance Margie Wilkison?"

Marjorie dropped her doughnut into her lap in amazement. How could this man possibly know her name? But she never thought for a moment of attempting to conceal her identity. So she answered unhesitatingly.

"Yes, my name is Marjorie Wilkinson. Why?"

The old man squinted one eye, and, glorying in the completeness of his disguise, looked into her face.

"You know why as good as I do, young leddy! They's no use pretendin'!"

At these words both girls sprang up instantly. There was something queer about the old creature —something uncanny! Both girls shuddered involuntarily, and with a common purpose started for

the door, leaving their half-finished doughnuts on the table.

But the man held up his hand. He had no intention of allowing them to escape thus easily.

"Maybe you think we don't know all about who you are!" he said mockingly.

Marjorie looked helplessly at the woman.

"Is he crazy?" she asked.

"No, indeed," replied the other. "He really knows what he's talking about. And you do too, only you won't own up to it!"

"Frieda!" said Marjorie, in a terrified voice. "We must get out of here immediately."

"Not so fast! Not so fast!" said the old man. "All the doors happen to be locked. But in case you think I mean to harm you, I'll explain, though I know you're only pretendin' like you don't know.

"Miss, you know better'n I do that you ran away from your pap. And you must know as how he's anxious to get you back. Though mebbe you're not acquainted with the fact that he's offered a thousand dollars' reward to them as locates you and notifies him accordingly. Therefore, I mean to hold you—and your friend, too, to keep you company—until your pap gets my message and shows up to claim you and give me my reward. My wife jest had one of them new fangled arrangements for runnin' water put in the house, and it cost us a pretty penny; the money'll come in right handy. We've got a nice

bedroom for you upstairs, so you might as well make yourselfs to home. Now is there anything I can do for you?"

By this time Marjorie realized that he was really in earnest, though where he could have heard the strange story appalled her. She stood still, hopeless, in the centre of the room, and two great tears rolled down her cheeks.

"It's all a ghastly lie!" she cried. "You people are ordinary kidnappers—and that's the meanest kind of criminal there is!" She flashed a look of intense hatred at them both. "My father knows all about where I am, and he gave me full permission to go with the scouts. If you don't believe me, why don't you telephone him?"

"Easy, easy, me gal!" said the old man, with a cynical smile on his face. "It's possible, of course, that we might have the wrong Margaret Wilkison, but I guess I'll find that out. A thousand dollars would lift the mortgage from this yere farm!"

"My name is *Marjorie,* not Margaret!" snapped the girl. "So you see you're mistaken after all, and you might as well let us go! You'll never get anything but a jail sentence out of my father!"

"Give me a chance to find that out; then, if I'm mistaken, I give you my word, I'll let you both go."

"Well, then go phone now!" challenged Frieda. Though she had said nothing thus far, it was not because she was not greatly incensed. Had there been

any hope of escape, she would have leaped at the old man, for she was exceptionally strong. But she realized that it was useless to attempt such a thing.

"Yes, go!" commanded Marjorie; and she gave the man her telephone number. "Just see what my father says!"

"I am going over to Besley now. We ain't rich enough to have a telephone here. So make yourselfs comfortable, while I'm gone. Reckon I'll lock the missis in, too, in case you all get too rambunctious for her!"

With these words he unbolted the door and went out locking it on the outside behind him. Frieda's mind instantly flew to the windows, but they were completely covered by a heavy wire screening which was fastened to the window frame on the outside.

"I'm sorry, girls," said the woman, her voice softening with pity, "but he really won't hurt you. He only wants the money. You don't know how it feels to be poor all yer life and then see a chance to make a tidy sum, and not put all yer powers into gettin' it. It'll only be a matter of a day or two, and then you can join yer party again if you ain't the one we're lookin fer. And if you are, think how glad yer pap will be to see you again. Now—want to come upstairs?"

The girls followed the woman half-heartedly up the crooked stair-case to the second floor, all the

while watching for chances to escape. But they saw none.

The bedroom into which she led them was neat and clean, and the bed linen spotless. Marjorie silently thanked her for that, and sat down upon the chair beside the window. Here there was no wire screening—only netting, and the sash was wide open. The lovely air from the orchard floated in, reminding them what a beautiful day it was outside. Marjorie secretly wished that Ruth were her fellow-sufferer, as originally planned; for somehow she felt that Ruth, with her cleverness, could rise superior to almost any contingency.

"Well, Frieda, I guess we're in for it!" she remarked as the door was closed, and the retreating footsteps of the woman could be heard going down stairs again. "And I suppose there's no use getting excited over it. But it certainly is hard luck!"

"Marj!" cried Frieda suddenly, in a doleful tone. "Suppose this makes us too late for the water meet!"

The idea had not occurred to Marjorie. She looked thunderstruck for a moment, but upon consideration, dismissed the thought with her usual optimism.

"It simply couldn't, Frieda," she reassured the other. "Today's only Friday; the old sinner will surely find out today that he's mistaken and let us go early tomorrow. It's two days' trip—we'll only be a day late; and the meet isn't till Wednesday.

Oh, Frieda—" she jumped up and threw her arms around her companion—"I'd be so disappointed if I don't have a chance to try for that cup!"

The woman appeared with their luncheon, and the girls found themselves treated like royal guests. They slept in the afternoon, but by five o'clock the old man had not appeared, and Marjorie's hopes sank.

One day was lost!

CHAPTER XII

THE SEARCH

As THE scouts pushed off from the shore, they lingered until Marjorie and Frieda disappeared around a bend in the stream on their way to the farm-house. Then, still thinking of the peaches, they went slowly forward.

"Let's go slowly, and give the girls a chance to catch us," suggested Ethel. "I could eat a peach right now."

"So could I," agreed Lily.

"Oh, Marj and Frieda will soon catch us," reassured Ruth. "They're the two best canoeists we've got."

"You're right, Ruth," said Florence Evans. "Really, it hardly seems worth while for the rest of us to go in that water meet. Marj will be so sure to carry off the prize!"

"What did I tell you, Lil?" asked Ruth, triumphantly.

"Well, don't repeat it, or I'm liable to upset the canoe again." She was in quite a good humor now, and could laugh about the episode. "But I do

think," she added, "that we all have a good chance to become as expert as Marj is, and we're bum sports if we just sit back and complain that it isn't fair! It would spoil all her pleasure!"

"Right you are, Lily!" commented Miss Phillips. "I am beginning to see that it is worth while to be a scout, after all."

"Yes, I am ashamed of myself," said Ruth, humbly. "But I am putting all my energy into the job, and I hope maybe I am improving, a teeny-weeny bit. How about it, Captain?"

"You are doing very well, Ruth," she replied, with sincerity.

The girls paddled on in silence for a time, all the while keeping a sharp look-out behind them for the absent ones. But there were so many bends and turns, and the trees were so thick on either side, that they could scarcely see two hundred yards behind them. Suddenly Ruth noticed a little tributary to the right.

"Where did that come from, Captain?" she asked.

"Not far from the farm where the girls stopped for peaches. We might have followed it, but it would have necessitated a portage, so I preferred the longer way enirely by water."

"That's the one Marj and Frieda took!" cried Ruth, with assurance. "And you can mark my words, they're ahead of us right now! They just thought they'd be smart and beat us!"

"But they'd have to make portage," objected Ethel. "And with all those peaches——"

"Portages mean nothing in Frieda Hammer's young life!" contradicted Ruth. "She's as strong as an ox!"

"Well, if they did, I call it mean," said Florence. "I'm dying for a peach."

"Me too!" put in Alice.

They fell silent again; the creek as it approached the river was becaming swifter, and the canoes required more attention. Miss Phillips alone was worried about the missing girls; it did not seem like either Marjorie or Frieda to play such a trick. Had Ruth been one of the two she would hardly have given the matter a thought, but under these circumstances she was afraid that something had happened.

By the time four o'clock came they were approaching the locality which the captain had designated for their final night in the open. All the girls looked eagerly for the signs of a canoe or of their missing companions, and hoped at every instant to hear the familiar whistle. But they heard nothing except the sounds of nature, the dip of the paddles, and the lapping of the water against the sides of the canoes.

"They're hiding, I'll bet!" exclaimed Ruth, as she pulled in to shore.

"No, they're not either!" said Miss Phillips, who

had already landed her canoe. "I'm afraid something has happened."

"I'll go right back, Captain!" offered Ruth. "Who'll go with me?"

"Thanks, Ruth," said Miss Phillips; "but I'm afraid it's too late. Remember, it would mean to paddle up stream. And night is coming on, too. There would be no use of several of us getting lost, as well as the other two. A least, they are together. Marjorie's canoe may have sprung another leak."

"But what shall we do, Captain?" inquired Lily, now becoming alarmed.

"We'll wait till tomorrow morning, and then I will take one of you and go back. In the meantime, we may as well get to work and make our camp."

"But who'll cook?" demanded Ruth. The idea of assuming Frieda's duties did not particularly appeal to her.

"We'll have to take turns," answered Miss Phillips. "Ruth, you and Lily will prepare supper tonight, and Frances and Alice will get breakfast. I'll appoint others later. For we may be here a good while."

"Oh, I hope not," said Frances, optimistically.

"Suppose we'd miss the water meet," suggested Ruth in distress.

"Well, I hope we shan't; but that wouldn't be nearly so tragic as losing two of our girls," said Lily.

The tents were soon put up, and a tempting meal was spread before the tired and hungry girls. But it did not prove to be a merry one. A shadow seemed to have fallen upon the group; the lost girls were general favorites, and everyone, except Ruth, who pretended to be, was disturbed over their absence. Therefore no one was sorry when Miss Phillips suggested that they all go to bed early.

"I should like an early breakfast, cooks," said the captain. "Is five o'clock too soon? Then Ethel and I will start back for the farm house, to inquire news of the girls, and to search. Frances, you will be in charge, of course, here at the camp. Maintain strict discipline, please. Swimming and canoeing will both be permitted, but no girl is to go out of sight of camp alone."

Both Ethel and her captain found it an entirely different matter to paddle up stream instead of down; their shoulders ached and their hands were blistered when, about three o'clock in the afternoon, they finally arrived at the farm-house. All along the way they had looked for a canoe and listened for the sound of girls' voices, and had whistled and called, but in vain; only the echo of their own voices answered their appeals.

It was unfortunate that their sneakers made no sound as they walked across the grass, and that Marjorie and Frieda at the time happened to be lying on the bed, out of view of the window. Nor

did they hear the voices, for their room was at the other end of the house from the kitchen. Their captor saw the visitors approaching, and went to the kitchen window. In a soft voice she asked what they wanted.

"Did you see anything of two girls who came here yesterday to buy some peaches?" asked Miss Phillips.

The woman had to think quickly, in order to decide upon the best reply to make. In a second, however, she answered,

"Yes, I sold 'em a dollar's worth, and they went down yonder and got into their boat again."

"Did they say anything about playing a joke on us?"

"Yes, they asked me if there was any different way, and I told them about that little branch off to the north. They laughed, and said they'd take it, and mebbe beat you. They ain't lost, are they?"

"They must be!" sighed Miss Phillips, in extreme distress. She was sincerely alarmed now.

"Any tramps around here?" she inquired anxiously.

"No—hardly ever. And what there is, is harmless. Nothin' could have hurt them. Mebbe their boat sprung a leak, and they had to stop and get it fixed."

"And which way did they go?" repeated Miss Phillips.

"That there way—" replied the woman, pointing.

"They carried their boat down past that there oak tree—you'll find a stream there, if you want ter follow it. Good luck to you!" she concluded, as her visitors turned to go.

"Thank you," said Miss Phillips; and she and Ethel went in the direction indicated.

CHAPTER XIII

PRISONERS

All Friday afternoon, Frieda and Marjorie watched eagerly for the return of their jailer, or for some trace of the scouts. But no one came near. By supper time they were worn out and disheartened. They knew that they must spend the night at the farm-house.

They were not, however, overcome by a sense of physical fear. The old people seemed slightly crazy to them, but harmless. They slept a little, late in the afternoon, and finally were awakened by their captor's summons to supper.

Again they had a wonderful meal placed before them. The woman, it would seem, was ashamed of her husband's actions, and was doing everything she could to make it up to them. In spite of herself, Marjorie felt a sort of liking for her.

"I suppose you may as well tell us your name," remarked Marjorie, as she spread some delicious peach preserves upon the tempting hot muffin in her hand.

"Our name is Higgins," replied the woman, lowering her eyes. "And yours?"

"I am Miss Wilkinson, as you know, and my friend is Miss Hammer."

There was a silence for a few moments while they ate. Both girls realized that even now the scouts were probably eating something like canned salmon and beans, while they enjoyed a chicken dinner; but they said nothing. Marjorie made up her mind not to utter a word of praise of Mrs. Higgins' cooking.

"It's evident," she remarked sarcastically, "that you people never had any children!"

A faint flush spread over the woman's face, and then a tear came to her eye. But she looked down hastily at her plate to hide her embarrassment.

"No. we never did," she replied. "But how did you know?"

"No mother or father could be so cruel!" answered Marjorie cuttingly.

The thrust hit deep; the older woman was silenced. The girl had touched the tenderest chords of her heart, and now she was fully ashamed. She would have abandoned the whole project had she dared, she was so completely on her prisoners' side. But she was afraid of the old man; he might do something desperate to them all if she went back on her word. And even now she realized that she too was a prisoner, just as much as the girls were, and in her own house!

"What do you think can be keeping him?" asked

Frieda, refusing to dignify such a contemptible creature with a name.

"I don't know," replied the woman. "Perhaps the telephone is out of order. Or maybe he's took sick."

Fresh peach ice-cream and a wonderful chocolate cake failed to produce any sort of comment on the part of the girls. Marjorie thought she had never tasted such delicious cooking in her life, but still she said nothing. Mrs. Higgins sighed; she so seldom had anyone to cook for, and it would have meant so much to her to have her efforts appreciated.

"I think there are some games in the table drawer in the parlor," she told the girls, as they rose from the table. "You're welcome to play with 'em."

Frieda went in and got them, but Marjorie went straight to her room. Throwing herself upon the bed, she sobbed bitterly.

"Why do you 'spose old Higgins isn't back?" she asked, as Frieda entered their bedroom.

"Probably he couldn't get your father," said the other. "Are you sure he would be home?"

Marjorie thought for a moment, and then started to weep afresh.

"No, he wouldn't!" she exclaimed. Then, brokenly, "Mama and papa were going away this morning for a week-end party, and Jack is camping. Oh, Frieda!" Her voice died in a wail of woe.

Frieda sat down beside Marjorie and drew her

head to her shoulder. She let her cry for a minute or so, and then tried to calm her.

"Nothing awful can happen, Marjorie," she said, soothingly. "We'll only miss a few days of good time at the most. For something is sure to happen —the real Margie Wilkinson that they are looking for will turn up, or old Higgins will reach your father by phone, and he'll come hot-foot himself— or the scouts will send a rescue party, or——"

Marjorie smiled faintly through her tears.

"You are a great comfort, Frieda. I don't know what I'd ever do without you. I suppose there are worse things than missing the meet and a few days at Silvertown; but oh, I was so eager to go!"

"Of course you were! Well, let's don't worry yet—why there are four whole days left, and it only takes two to get there. My, wasn't that wonderful chocolate cake, though? I could almost love old lady Higgins for that!"

"I hate her!" cried Marjorie, vehemently. "She's just as much to blame as the old man!"

"Maybe not; maybe he rules her completely. Some men do, you know!"

"Well, I'm never going to get married, then!" announced Marjorie. "In fact, I hate all men!"

"Come, this won't get us anywhere," interrupted Frieda; "let's play flinch, and try to forget it."

The girls played until nearly nine o'clock, and then decided to go to bed. Worn out from the

mental strain, they felt grateful for the comfortable bed, and soon fell asleep, clasping each other's hands. There is nothing so effective in cementing a friendship as a common misfortune.

They slept late the next morning, and were awakened by a knock at their door. It proved to be Mrs. Higgins, with a tray.

"Good morning, girls," she said cheerily; "how are you today?"

Both girls suppressed their natural inclination to say something pleasant, and Frieda, with a suggestion of her old rudeness, asked,

"Is that old man back yet?"

Mrs. Higgins shook her head sadly.

"Not yet, Miss. Mebbe the telephone's broke. Is your pap likely to be home, Miss Wilkins?"

"No, he and mother went on a week-end motor trip. Of course he won't be able to get them!"

"Why didn't you tell him that?"

She set the tray on a table by the window. The breakfast,—fresh peaches with cream, hot biscuits, eggs, and fragrant coffee—certainly looked inviting. Marjorie eyed it critically.

"As a matter of fact, I forgot," she replied, icily.

"Well, more's the pity for you! If I know Mr. Higgins, he'll stay right on the job till he gets an answer. If that's the case, you needn't hope to get away till your parents come back."

Marjorie's eyes flashed in anger.

"You're wicked, cruel people!" she cried; "and when my father hears about it, he'll have you put in prison! So there!"

"But he can't!" objected Mrs. Higgins. "We're only tryin' to help the police catch a runaway gal. That's obeyin' the law, ain't it—not breakin' it!"

Marjorie was silent, and the woman opened the door and went out. The girls turned to their breakfast.

"I wish I were dead!" exclaimed Marjorie. "I won't eat her old food!" Then suddenly, with a flash of inspiration, "Frieda, let's go on a hunger strike—like the woman suffragists did! They wouldn't dare let us die."

"But in the meantime the meet would be over," objected Frieda, proceeding to the table, and pouring cream over her peaches. "No, Marjorie, that won't do. But we'll think of a better plan. Come, eat your peaches."

Her companion, however, did not stir from the bed. Frieda carried her own peaches over to the window and sat upon the broad sill to eat them. Gazing idly out, she noticed a slender lattice which led up to the window, and an arbor underneath. That was the solution of their problem! Her eyes lighted up with the discovery.

"Marj!" she whispered, excitedly. "There's a lattice and an arbor just outside our window! We can easily escape!"

The other girl was out of bed in an instant, looking eagerly out of the window. Frieda was right; the structure, frail though it was, looked sufficiently strong to support their slender weight.

"Let's do it right away, Frieda!" proposed Marjorie. "Oh, you are a trump!" She seized her companion, and hugged her in ecstacy.

"Sh!" cautioned the other. "No, I'd love to go right away, but I really think we better wait till dark. Won't it be wonderful to give the old man the slip?"

"Perfect!" agreed Marjorie. "Gracious, Frieda, it just seems as if I couldn't wait!"

"Well, you must! And let's stuff all the food we can, for most likely there isn't any left in our canoes, and we have no money. Are you good for a two-day fast?"

"I'm good for anything, if we only get away! And, believe me, I'll stuff!"

The girls dressed, and spent the morning wandering about the house and looking at some old books and magazines, the latter of which had evidently been current during Mrs. Higgins' youth. They asked continually for news of her husband, but always received a negative reply. They managed to look annoyed and to preserve, in the presence of their captor, the same sullen attitude which they had assumed at the beginning.

At noon they ate a particularly hearty meal, and

then retired to their room to take a nap. For they felt that the chances were that they would get little sleep that night. It was while they were lying down, and just beginning to doze off, that Miss Phillips and Ethel came in search of them and held the conversation with Mrs. Higgins through the window. But they were utterly unconscious of the whole proceeding.

They awakened a little before six, just in time to get ready for supper. Again they ate heartily and inquired with concern for the old man.

"You needn't expect to see 'im before Monday or Tuesday, or whenever your pap comes home," Mrs. Hggiins repeated; "for I know he'll stick to the end. They's a nice hotel at Besley, and he has cronies there; in fact, he often goes off fer several days at a time!"

"And leaves you all alone?" demanded Marjorie indignantly. "Men are beasts, aren't they?" she added.

"Some is," sighed Mrs. Higgins; "the fact is, I'm quite o' that mind meself about the old man!"

The girls went to their rooms after supper, announcing their intention of going to bed early. Mrs. Higgins, too, decided to turn in as soon as the dishes were done. Marjorie was just on the point of offering to help when she reconsidered her idea, and decided it would be wisest to let things stay as they were.

Marjorie and Frieda watched the sunset and the deepening twilight from their window, and kept a sharp look out for Mr. Higgins. When it was finally quite dark, and they had heard the stairs creak as Mrs. Higgins went to bed, and all was still in the house, they cut the netting of the window with Frieda's scout knife, and prepared to descend. Frieda went first.

With the end of the bed sheet tied around her waist, she put one foot upon the lattice. Then, finding that it supported her weight, she descended cautiously step by step. Fortunately for her, and for her companion as well, both girls wore sneakers. It was a more difficult matter for Marjorie to follow, for she had no sheet to protect her. But knowing that Frieda, who was heavier, had arrived safely, she made the descent boldly. In a moment they were on the ground together.

Free at last!

They stopped to untie the sheet and hide it behind a bush, and then hurried noiselessly on. Their sneakers allowed them to advance rapidly, and in absolute silence. In a short time they reached the water's edge. But here they encountered difficulty: *the canoe was gone!*

"Of course," whispered Marjorie, "we might have know the miserable wretch would think of that. Never mind, we'll beat him all the same! Let's swim across! I know there's a path on the oppo-

site shore and we'll be less likely to be caught!"

Fortunately, the night was warm, and the girls felt no shock as they plunged into the dark water. They were both exceptionally good swimmers; otherwise the weight of their clothes might have seriously retarded their progress.

"I've never been in swimming at night before," remarked Marjorie, as she made her way rapidly through the water.

"Oh, I have, heaps of times," said Frieda.

"Do you 'spose we'll take cold?" asked the other, a minute later.

"Not if we walk fast. And let's—I'm not a bit tired, are you?"

"I should hope not, after this afternoon's sleep. Let's hurry, and not lose a minute!"

They found that the path was plainly visible in the moonlight; and they walked as fast as they could, glancing nervously over their shoulders now and again, as if in fear of persuit.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST DAY OF THE TRIP

It was after ten o'clock when Miss Phillips and Ethel finally dragged their canoe upon the shore where the rest of the scouts were camping. In answer to their call the girls all appeared at once. But they did not need to ask the news; the failure to find Marjorie and Frieda was plainly written on the countenance of the searchers.

Lily Andrews, who had forced herself to keep cheerful all day long in spite of her increasing fears, broke down at the captain's first words, and sobbed uncontrollably.

"Not a trace!" sighed Miss Phillips from the depths of a disconsolate weariness.

"I just know they have been drowned!" wailed Lily.

"No, I don't think that," replied the captain; "they are too good swimmers."

"Tell us all about it!" begged Alice, also beginning to cry.

"No—wait!" protested Frances, gently. "Remember Captain Phillips and Ethel must be starved, and so tired. Come and eat first; we have something

nice all ready for you. Then, when you're both a little bit rested you can tell us the whole story."

Miss Phillips gave Frances a grateful look, and the whole party went to the tents, where a bright fire was burning.

"It was lovely of you to wait up for us," said Miss Phillips, taking the tin plate Doris handed her.

"We couldn't any of us have slept a wink till you did come," said Ruth. "We were so excited and worried."

The two ate silently while Ruth and Doris aimed to keep up the spirits of the party by relating some of the trifling incidents of the day. Miss Phillips finished her tea and turned to the girls.

"There unfortunately isn't much to tell," she said sadly; and then proceeded to relate her conversation with the woman at the farm-house.

"We took her advice," she continued," and made the portage which she suggested. It was a short cut—possibly it saved us a mile or so. Then we went very slowly, looking everywhere for a canoe, and calling at intervals, and whistling the troop call. Once we saw two girls in the woods and our hearts fairly stopped beating; but when they came nearer we realized they did not look anything like our girls. Then, as soon as it got dark, we went faster, calling the girls' names, however, as we went along. Twice we stopped people—farmers—to ask if they had seen anything of the girls, but we got no information.

"And so you see our only hope lies in what the woman reported that the girls said—that they would press on and try to beat us to Silvertown. I devoutly hope that is the case; but I am inclined to doubt it, for it somehow does not sound like Marjorie Wilkinson."

"But, Captain," put in Ruth, "Marj really isn't such a saint, even though you think she is. I've known her to play jokes on people before, particularly when it is sort of like a game, as this is, and wouldn't harm anybody."

"But it harms me!" sobbed Lily. "I'm scared to death about her."

"No, Lily, don't be that!" urged Miss Phillips; "we mustn't give up yet!"

"And don't forget," added Ruth, "that Frieda Hammer's with Marj—and the whole idea may be hers."

They discussed the matter with animation for a little while. Ruth could hardly keep down an exuberance of feeling, she was so delighted in knowing that her plan was working. She had, however, one dreadful scare, a contingency which she had never once thought of. It was Ethel Todd who suggested it.

"Captain Phillips," she said, "in case the girls have been delayed by a leak or an accident of some sort, and are not at Silvertown, couldn't we postpone the meet until Saturday?"

Ruth became white to the lips. Suppose her whole scheme should fall through for such a reason, and after so much success! In the moment that elapsed while Miss Phillips considered the proposition, she suffered agonies. But at last the answer came—and relieved her.

"I wish we might," she said, rising; "but there are so many events planned at Silvertown that if we want the lake and an audience we have to ask for a date months ahead. No," she concluded sadly, "the thing will have to go on—unless—of course ——"

"No! No! Don't say it, Captain!" cried Lily, in distress, "Let's believe nothing dreadful could happen!"

"I hope not," Miss Phillips replied. "Suppose we turn in now, girls, so we can get an early start tomorrow."

"And see Marj and Frieda and Silverton all at once!" exclaimed Ruth; and the cheerful tone of her words brought a ray of hope to those less optimistic.

Miss Phillips had expected that, in accordance with their schedule, they might reach Silvertown by Saturday night. But this, of course, was now impossible; and a wire on Sunday morning preceded them to announce their arrival for five o'clock.

All day long they paddled steadily. At first they seemed silent and rather depressed; but as they

neared Silvertown their excitement increased, and they grew more and more hopeful of finding their lost companions. It was Ruth Henry who encouraged this spirit, rejoicing inwardly at the disappointment they were soon to encounter. She was glad that she had managed to include Frieda in the scheme, for she had never cared for the country girl, and was thankful for an opportunity to "put her in her place," as she said. It was ridiculous of Miss Phillips to think of allowing such a person to take part in an event at Silvertown, and she was pleased over the chance to exclude her. But Frieda and Marjorie, and, in fact, all the other scouts, would be forever unaware of the real cause of the adventure.

"One hour more!" observed Lily looking at her watch. "And we'll see Marj."

"One hour more!" said Ruth, "and we'll see our house, and Silvertown!"

"One hour more!" echoed Doris, "and we'll know who is giving us our wonderful trip!"

"One hour more!" added Miss Phillips, "and you'll get the surprise of your life!"

"Oh, what, Captain?" asked Ruth, with intense interest.

"Or perhaps I had better say *surprises!*" she corrected. "For there will be more than one!"

The creek had become wider now, and it was more difficult to handle the canoes. But the girls put forth great effort, even succeeding in increasing

their speed, so anxious were they to reach their destination. The scenery was lovely; now and then there were attractive bungalows along the water's edge. The girls watched impatiently for signs of Silvertown.

"We shall approach the town from the rear," observed Miss Phillips; "so we will not get the best view."

"And how are we to know it?" asked Frances.

"We shall see the big lake joining the creek, and then in a minute or two, we'll see it. As I have said before, the whole place isn't very big."

When the canoes actually came to the lake and approached, as Ruth said, "the isle of their dreams," they were surprised at how little of the town they could actually see. For, on the shore towards the creek the trees were large and close together; only the roof of the church or a particularly high house was now and again visible above the trees.

Two luxurious machines stood on the bank, and the girls looked instantly to identify the drivers. Lily was the only one to recognize one of them. For both were chauffeurs.

"That's our chauffeur!" she cried, in consternation. "Yes, and one of those cars is ours, too!"

"Well, of all things, Lil!" exclaimed Ruth. "How do you suppose——?"

But Lily was already out of the canoe, and was running toward the chauffeur.

"Henry, where did you come from? Are mamma and papa here? Have two Girl Scouts arrived here before us? Where——?"

Henry touched his cap, and smiled at this breathless storm of questions.

"Yes, Miss Lily," he finally replied; "Mr. and Mrs. Andrews are here, and you will see them in a few minutes. And there are some young people who arrived yesterday——"

Lily gasped in astonishment, and the others pressed close about her and the chauffeur.

—"But they were not *girls;* they were——"

"Sh!" cautioned Miss Phillips. "Not a word about that, please. It's a surprise."

When Lily finally learned that Marjorie and Frieda had not arrived, her eyes filled with tears; she stood still, as if she wanted to get into the canoe again and go back. But Miss Phillips told the girls to get into the machines.

"But who will take care of our canoes?" asked Ethel, who had no desire to lose them a second time.

"One of the men will be right along, Miss," explained Henry. "You needn't worry."

The machines drove for a short distance along a dirt lane which seemed to go right through the heart of the woods. When they finally emerged, the girls beheld a smooth white road lined with beautiful bungalows and houses, all in the most perfect

condition. Green lawns, dotted here and there with flowers, and enclosed by hedges, surrounded the lovely dwellings.

"And is our house as lovely as these?" asked Ruth, impressed by the splendor of it all.

"Just a minute and you can see for yourself," replied the captain.

At these words the car slowed up and turned abruptly through an open gate, and up a wide, curving driveway, which led to a charming house of the English type. It was low and rambling, but very large; indeed, at first glance it seemed to the girls to be almost the size of their dormitory at Miss Allen's.

On the wide veranda of the house the girls could plainly see a group of people—apparently all men. No, there was one woman in the center of the group. It was Mrs. Andrews!

"But who are they?" questioned Ruth, turning to the captain.

"Some of the Boy Scouts," replied the latter; "and Mr. Remington—and our benefactor and his wife: Mr. and Mrs. Andrews!"

But amid the noisy, happy greetings that followed, there was a great note of sadness; Marjorie and Frieda were missing, and with one exception, no one knew what had happened to them!

CHAPTER XV

THE PURSUIT

ALTHOUGH Harold Mason had told the girls and Mrs. Higgins that he was going to Besley to telephone to Marjorie's father, he naturally did no such thing. He spent the time, however, in the woods, near enough so that he might keep the farm-house in view and yet be concealed from its inmates. At night he crept back to the barn to sleep.

He therefore witnessed the return of Miss Phillips and Ethel in search of their missing companions, and approached close enough to catch most of the conversation. He was secretly pleased with the ingenuity of Mrs. Higgins, and smiled at old Michael's report that she was not "all there." He found her an admirable accomplice.

The only drawback to his situation was the lack of food. He was forced to go and buy his meals or else to live on cold canned things all the time. These two methods he alternated, going over to Besley each night for his evening meal, and buying enought there for his breakfast and lunch.

It so happened that he was still at Besley when the girls made their escape. Returning that night

about nine o'clock, all seemed as quiet as usual to him, and he made his way up to the barn loft to sleep.

About seven o'clock the next morning he was awakened by the shrill cries of Mrs. Higgins.

"The girls is gone!" she shrieked, although Harold had no idea who she expected would hear her. However, he hastened to the house, unlocked the door, and found her wringing her hands and walking wildly about the kitchen.

"Are you sure?" he asked, unable to believe the news.

"Come and see fer yourself," she answered, leading the way to their room.

The door was standing open and the bed clothes were thrown back over the bed. The netting which had covered the window was hanging in shreds, and fluttering to and fro in the light breeze; already the room was filled with flies.

"How in the world——?" began Harold.

"It must be by the lattice here on the wall!" She led the way across the room, and directed her guest to follow her. Then she told him to lean out of the window. "You've got to admit it was plucky of 'em!" she added.

"Darn it all!" cried Harold, in the utmost dismay. "And here I thought maybe I'd get news from the girl's father today! But where could they have gone? I removed their canoe."

Harold was so excited that he forgot the disguised tones and accents he had adopted, and his voice sounded particularly young and boyish. Mrs. Higgins looked at him critically, but she did not detect the deceit. She simply thought the man was beside himself at the idea of losing so much money when it was just about to be within his grasp. And yet she felt glad, in a way, that the girls had escaped.

"They's no path to speak of on this here side o' the creek. They must 'ave swam acrost!"

"Is there a path on the opposite bank?" asked Harold.

"Yes—a good one."

"But their clothing would be all wet. And they have no money, and nothing to eat!"

"Sure enough," said Mrs. Higgins. She was silent then for a moment, seemingly lost in thought. "Poor critters!" she sighed. "I only hope that they don't ketch their death of cold."

"Isn't there any place they could stop?" asked Harold, carelessly. In reality, he knew that an affirmative answer would be the only hope for the success of his plan.

But Mrs. Higgins did not perceive any ulterior motive. She seemed only to be thinking of the girls' safety.

"Yes," she answered slowly. "There's the widder Brown and her brother. But they're that tight I can't believe they'd ever take anybody in."

"And how far away do they live?"

"About four mile—the gals'd be sure to stop by then, with their wet clothin' and all. Oh, I do hope the widder loosens up a bit and takes 'em in!"

"Well, I guess there's nothing more to do," said Harold; "I might as well give up. But you did your part fine, Mrs. Higgins! And here's another five for all your trouble!"

Harold turned over the keys to her and sauntered out to the barn to get his car. But once away from the farm, he drove like mad.

Crossing the nearest bridge, he took the road along the stream, keeping a sharp look-out for the "widder Brown's" and watching his speedometer to know when he had gone four miles.

Soon he came to a tumble-down farm-house, quite different from the neat, up-to-date one he had just left. But he hardly noticed the place itself, for the most pleasing sight that could have greeted him met his eyes. Hanging on a clothes line in the back yard, exposed to the sun, were two scout uniforms!

Harold breathed a great sigh of relief and pulled his Ford up beside the dilapidated porch. He noticed with satisfaction that the woodwork needed painting, and he was glad to recall the fact that Mrs. Higgins had said they loved money. Surely he could bribe them to do what he wanted here!

A middle-aged man, unshaven and slovenly in appearance, shuffled to the door. Harold diplo-

matically touched his hat, and went up the steps. Then he repeated the story he had told to Mrs. Higgins, handing the man a ten dollar gold piece and offering him half of the reward in case they were successful. He said nothing, however, about the experience at Mrs. Higgins'. He watched the greedy eyes gleam at the glitter of the precious metal, and knew before the man made his answer that it would be favorable.

"It'll be hard," he objected, "because we'd have to keep the winders closed downstairs. It'd be pretty stuffy."

"But you can keep the upstairs ones open," said Harold, impatiently. "However, suit yourself. Ain't it worth ten dollars to you sure, with a chance at five hundred, to stand a little heat for a day or two till I get this runaway gal's dad on the phone?"

The allurement proved too great; the man surrendered.

"The gals is still in bed," he said; "they only got here about four o'clock this mornin' and my sister put 'em right t' bed. So we've got a good chance to git everything locked up tight."

"All right," replied Harold. "I'll go back to the telephone. The girl says her pa and ma would be out o' town till Tuesday, so I'll jest stop at Besley and keep at it. Then, no matter what happens, I'll turn up Tuesday night—with either good news or bad news. But even if it's bad news, there's another

ten-spot here for you if the girls is still with you!"

"Very good!" agreed the man, perfectly pleased with the transaction. "They'll be here! Don't you fret!"

Harold had just a moment to meet the "Widder Brown," and when the man was not looking, he pressed a crumpled bill into her hand. Then he jumped into his Ford and was gone.

"And now for home and mother!" he exclaimed, making for the creek, where he stopped a few minutes to remove and wash off his disguise.

"By George! That feels good!" he said, as he finished shaving with the aid of his pocket mirror. Then, jumping into the creek for a swim, he came out and dressed in his own clothes.

"Even old lady Higgins wouldn't know me now!" he chuckled in satisfaction. Then, "I wonder how long the old bird will keep Marjorie and Frieda! Ha! Ha! Ruth, the trick's done! You will get the silver cup. And I'm going to be engaged to the prettiest little girl in town very soon, or know the reason why!

"By the immortal gods!" he cried; "I do believe I'll make a trip to Silvertown myself. But first I'll go home and get my duds!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE HOUSE-PARTY

Mr. and Mrs. Andrews had conferred long and thoughtfully with Mr. Remington and Miss Phillips over the selection of the nine boys to receive invitations to the house-party. They had no difficulty in deciding upon Dick Roberts, David Conner, Roger Harris, and Jack Wilkinson as not only the best all-round scouts, but the most popular with the girls; and Miss Phillips had begged valiantly for John Hadley, for Marjorie's sake. But the selection of the other four was a more difficult matter. Mr. Remington finally decided upon Stanley Winters and Raymond Hancock as the two most promising of the new, younger boys of the troop, in the interest of Florence Evans and Alice Endicott; and he recommended Max Stanton because he was a country boy, and hoped Frieda Hammer might find him congenial. Lawrence Field, a junior at Episcopal Academy, was the last one to be chosen; although he was not so well known to the girls, he was universally liked for his manliness, courtesy, and sincerity. No party was complete without Lawrence.

As soon as the girls had been introduced all

around, and the topic of the missing scouts discussed from all angles, Mrs. Andrews suggested that the girls might like to go to their rooms.

"But mama, we must go hunt Marjorie!" protested Lily.

"Yes, of course," replied Mrs. Andrews; "but not until you get some supper. I don't think that we would accomplish much by starting tonight."

"No!" said Mr. Andrews; "I'm in favor of an early party tomorrow morning. Who wants to go?"

He looked around at the tense, interested faces, and was not surprised to receive offers from all directions. It was evident that everyone wanted to assist. Ruth pouted a little. Was Marjorie again to occupy the center of the stage? She stepped back to hide the expression of annoyance which she knew her face must be betraying.

"But I think that it will be better not to send so many. In fact, I think that two trustworthy boys will be the best," said the host. "And perhaps Mr. Remington and I will take the other machine and go in a different direction. Remington, which two would you suggest?"

Before he could reply, John Hadley stepped forward and looked earnestly into his eyes.

"Please, sir," he said, forgetful of the appearance he was making, "please let me go!"

If he had not been so sincere and the affair so serious, the rest of the young people would have

broken into uproarious laughter at his frankness. But, as it was, an intense silence fell upon the group.

"Yes, John, you may go." The scoutmaster turned to Mr. Andrews. "Hadley drives a car well," he said, "and he is one of the oldest boys here. And now—" he looked from one to the other among the excited group—"I think I shall choose Jack Wilkinson for the other lad!"

"Hooray!" cried Jack, hilariously. But Ruth Henry looked displeased. Although she had no especial admirer among the Boy Scouts, her name was usually coupled with that of Jack Wilkinson whenever partners were chosen, and she felt dismayed to have him so anxious to leave her. Then she thought of Harold Mason, and of all he was doing for her sake, and she smiled contentedly. Her pride was satisfied to have one devoted attendant.

The girls followed Mrs. Andrews through the wide doorway and up the beautiful curved mahogany and white stair-case to the second floor. A maid in trim uniform opened the doors of their apartments. Dainty pink-and-white bedrooms, attractively colored rugs met their gaze. The white paint gleamed as if it had just been finished and the soft pink silk shades of the lamps gave a restful appearance to the room. Three or four rooms seemed to be built in a circle; the doors were communicating, and through them several spotless bathrooms were visible. A pile of suitcases in the centre of the floor

occupied the first and largest room which they entered.

"You will have to sort out your own suit-cases," laughed Mrs. Andrews. "We couldn't tell one from the other. And there are four bedrooms here, each with twin beds; in fact one," she added jokingly, "has triplet beds, so that all nine of you girls could be together."

"But there aren't nine of us!" wailed Lily, dolefully, beginning to sob again.

"Don't, dear!" begged Mrs. Andrews. "You just wait until those boys get on the job. I have great confidence in that big fellow—what's his name?—oh, yes, John Hadley! I believe he can do almost anything.

"Now girls, suppose you select your rooms and dress for dinner—just simple dresses such as you might wear in the evenings at school, for there will be no celebration tonight, just a quiet time at home. We had thought of a dinner party; but no one feels like it with Marjorie and Frieda missing."

Mrs. Andrews and the maid went out, leaving the girls to themselves.

"Isn't this a wonderful place!" exclaimed Ethel, admiringly. She felt that somehow they were not expressing their appreciation as they should. But Lily Andrews, absorbed as she was in her own trouble, was the last person to notice such an omission.

"Your father and mother are simply Angels—with a capital A!" cried Ruth, patronizingly putting her arm about Lily. "Oh, Lil, won't you please cheer up? I'm so positive nothing's happened—except some trifling accident—that I'd be willing to bet my last dollar on it. I don't know how I know it, but I do! Something just tells me! Marj'll come back just in time to win the race, just as she did the canoe—by finding the cave. I haven't known Marjie Wilkinson all her life for nothing."

"Oh, Ruth, you do make me feel better. But I wish I could really, truly, believe you."

Alice Endicott, who had just made a tour of inspection of the four bedrooms, interrupted the conversation by remarking:

"Girls, guess what! The rooms are all in different colors; green, rose, lavender and blue. Let's each choose our favorite color, regardless of whom we room with. Don't you think that would be fun?"

"Great!" assented several.

The results were indeed interesting. Lily, Frances Wright, and Florence Evans selected the rose room in which they were now seated, and which contained, as Mrs. Andrews termed them, triplet beds; Ruth Henry and Ethel Todd had the green room; Doris was alone in the lavender one, and Alice Endicott in the blue one. This left two vacancies for Marjorie and Frieda.

"But let's sleep together tonight, Doris," suggested Alice. "I do so hate to be alone."

"So do I," agreed the other; "I don't mind changing to blue for once."

The girls unpacked the dainty wardrobes which their mothers had sent. Only two suit-cases still stood untouched in the center of the rose room.

"Why, that's funny," remarked Ruth, suddenly; "I wonder who would send Frieda's!"

"I don't think anyone *sent* it," returned Ethel, quietly. "I think Mrs. Andrews purchased the whole thing herself. Won't it just be a crime if she doesn't get here to enjoy it?"

"It certainly will," said Ruth, though she felt that if Ethel knew the real facts she would add, "*your* crime, I mean."

The girls made a very pretty effect as they descended the beautiful stairway that evening, and were joined at the foot by the boys. They all went into the dining room together and found six small tables in different parts of the room, each with a silk shaded lamp arranged amid a centerpiece of flowers.

"It is a class party tonight," announced the hostess; "that is, as nearly as I could arrange it. Ethel and Frances, that is your table by the window, and John Hadley and Dick Roberts are to be with you. Ruth, you and Doris are to sit at this one beside us with Jack Wilkinson and Roger Harris; and Lily,

you and David will come with us. Stanley and Raymond are to take Florence and Alice to that one beside Miss Phillips; and Lawrence, you and Max may chaperone Miss Phillips and Mr. Remington. Now, I think we're ready."

The idea, which was Mrs. Andrews's, was a good one, for it did away with the embarrassment of a large crowd. Conversation buzzed merrily; the dinner was not only delicious, but beautifully served. Ruth, surveying the dining room and the girls in a quick glance, decided that even an unprejudiced observer would think their table the most attractive in the room; for she knew that she and Doris made a striking contrast together, each setting off the beauty of the other to advantage. Her eyes sparkled and her cheeks were flushed; she was conscious of the fact that Jack and Roger were being well entertained.

"I hear there's a bathing party and a marshmallow roast for tomorrow," observed Jack. "And here I've got to miss it—all because my sister——"

"Yes, and who am I to go with?" pouted Ruth. "I suppose I've got to find somebody else."

"Ruth, if you go back on me, after all these years! Only she has already," he added, turning to the others and pretending to be sorely grieved. "In the language of the poet, Ruth has a steady!"

"Ruth!" exclaimed Doris, dropping her macaroon. "What are you keeping from us?"

"Not a thing!" she protested. "It's only that I see a lot of a boy that lives next door to me—quite naturally!"

"Morning—noon—and night!" hummed Jack, composing his own tune as he went along.

"Oh, Jack, that isn't true," she denied. "But I warn you, if you go off and leave me, I'll jilt you for good. So there!"

"By Jupiter, I've a good notion not to go!" exclaimed the boy. "And I'll bet David Conner is just dying to stand in my shoes."

"Oh, that would never do," objected Doris. "David and John Hadley are deadly rivals for Marjorie's hand, and one would probably murder the other as they went along."

"How blood-thirsty you are, Doris," laughed Ruth, "and for such a gentle girl, too."

In the end, however, Jack decided to stick to his duty and go. If something serious should have happened to his sister, he wanted to be there. Accordingly, early the next morning, he set off with John, while the others proceeded to their bathing party.

CHAPTER XVII

A STRANGE BOY SCOUT

MARJORIE and Frieda began to feel very tired and uncomfortable after they had walked several miles in their wet clothing. Had the sun been out to dry them, or had they been familiar with the road, it would not have been so difficult to go on. Their pace became slower and slower, each girl making a desperate effort to keep cheerful for the sake of the other. But soon they began to look eagerly for a house where they could get food and have a place to rest. They knew that they dared not lie down upon the ground, for they would not only be in danger of cold, but also of discovery by their enemy. So they pressed valiantly on.

"Anyway, it's better than staying forever at that prison!" commented Marjorie. Her feet were particularly wet, and her shoes heavy.

"I should say so! But wasn't the old man awful? Marj, don't you hope we never are greedy like that when we get old?"

"You bet! But do you know, I felt sorry for his poor wife. Isn't it funny, Frieda, to think how differently a man may turn out, after he's been married

a long time? I don't think Mrs. Higgins loves him now, but probably she did when they were young."

"I suppose so!" sighed the other girl, much more interested in their own problem than in that of their former captors.

All the while she was keeping a sharp look-out among the trees, hoping to spy a house, or at least a forsaken barn where they might find protection. It was not long afterward that she was rewarded for her diligence.

"Look, Marj!" she cried. "Isn't that a house—or something?"

And suddenly the girls realized that the night was over, that the first grey light of dawn was upon them. Looking in the direction her companion indicated, Marjorie too distinguished a grey, shadowy outline in the distance. Her heart leaped for joy; there was a chance of a rest at last!

"Don't you wish we had a watch?" she said; "or even our maps?"

"Anyhow, we know it's Monday morning," said Frieda. "And we ought to get to Silvertown today—tonight, rather. For walking is as fast as canoeing."

By this time they were close enough to the structure to see that it was a rather tumble-down farm-house. The boards of the porch were rotting, and the woodwork everywhere needed paint. Two or three chairs on the porch made the girls certain of the fact that the place was inhabited. The win-

dows were all wide open, but there was not a sign of a screen. Obviously, this was not so prosperous a farm as the one they had just left. But Marjorie and Frieda did not mind; they were so weary that a great sense of thankfulness at the promise of a rest was the only feeling that possessed them.

"How much of the truth shall we tell?" asked Frieda, as they approached the porch.

"Only that we are Girl Scouts, who have lost our party, and had our canoe stolen," answered Marjorie, promptly. "And that we have no money, but when we get to Silvertown, we'll send it to pay for a bed and a meal!"

With no attempt at quiet, they walked boldly up the porch steps, and knocked loudly. They had to wait only a minute or two, until a middle-aged woman in a soiled wrapper came to the door. Her hair was already arranged in a knot; it was evident that she had been occupied in the process of dressing when she heard the knock. Marjorie told the story as briefly as possible, leaving out the part about their captivity.

"Yes, sure!" said the woman, in answer to their request. "I'll fix you up a cup of coffee, and you can go right to bed. Then I'll have a nice breakfast when you wake up."

She proceeded to fix up her own bed for the girls and loaned them night dresses so that she might hang their wet clothing out to dry. The girls drank

their coffee gratefully, and slipped into the borrowed garments, too tired even to laugh at the absurd appearance they made. They were asleep in no time.

It was noon when they finally awakened. Frieda jumped out, surprised at the brightness of the sun.

"Oh, Marj! We'll have to hurry!" she cried; "or else we won't get there tonight. Maybe the woman, whatever her name is, can tell us how many miles away Silvertown is."

She went to the door and called down the stairs, wishing that she knew the woman's name. In a second, however, she received an answer, and Mrs. Brown appeared at the foot of the stairway.

"Have a good nap?" she asked.

"Fine, thanks," replied Frieda. "But it's late, and we want to get started. Are our clothes dry?"

"Good and dry!" answered Mrs. Brown; "and I pressed your dresses fer you!"

"Oh, thanks!" called Marjorie, gratefully. "Will you bring them up, Mrs.——?"

"Brown," supplied the woman. "I'm a widder, and I live with me brother, Sam Cullen. You'll meet him when you come down."

A few minutes later she appeared with the clothing, all thoroughly dry, and, as she had said, the suits both carefully pressed. In high spirits, the girls dressed quickly.

When they went downstairs they were surprised at the darkness of the house. Then, looking around,

they saw that every window was tight shut, and the shutters closed and bolted from the outside. Two or three oil lamps were burning in the hall, kitchen and dining room.

"Why so dark?" asked Marjorie, as Mrs. Brown motioned her to a seat at the table.

"Well, we ain't got no nettin' and the flies gets in after the vittals. It's dreadful to be poor!"

"Mrs. Brown, how much shall we owe you for our visit?" asked Marjorie, changing the subject. "And will it be all right to send a money order?"

"Oh, don't worry about that!" said the older woman. "Yer welcome to what we've got—it ain't much. But I don't think you'd better start out to-day. Why not rest and wait till termorrer mornin' early? If you start now, you've got another night to spend in the woods, and I reckon you won't find another place to house you like this."

"Thanks ever so much," replied Marjorie; "but we don't want to miss our party any longer than necessary. About how far is it to Silvertown?"

"Dunno exactly—bout ten miles, I reckon." She really knew it was not nearly so far, but she thought that if she could persuade the girls to stay it would be so much easier than forcing them.

The girls ate their breakfast, which, though good, and well cooked, was not nearly so nice as the food Mrs. Higgins had given them. As they ate they talked the situation over. They thought that it was

about one o'clock, but having no watches, they were amazed to find it quarter of three. This deception was merely another part of Mrs. Brown's scheme.

"Frieda, I don't believe we could go ten miles before dark, even in our dry clothing," said Marjorie; "and I don't care about the prospects of another night in the woods by ourselves, with no tent, or food. If we only had some money, we could hire a machine!"

"Where would you hire it from?" put in Mrs. Brown, rather sharply. "Besley's the nearest town, and it's five miles off! Of course," she added; "if I had the money, you'd be welcome to it. But I ain't got no more than fifty cents to my name."

Marjorie sighed, and settled herself to the inevitable. They decided to stay.

Mrs. Brown, although delighted with the decision, was nevertheless in a quandry. She would have to let the girls go out; but could she trust them to return? She thought how angry her brother would be if she let them escape, and how roughly he might treat her afterwards for it. Still, she decided to take the risk.

"And what would you like to do this afternoon?" she inquired, politely. "Take a walk?"

The girls were delighted with this suggestion, for it reminded them of their freedom, but they did not wish to act upon it. They were still weary, and

their feet were sore; the prospect of rest was alluring.

"No, thanks, I think it would be nicer to stay on the porch, and take it easy," said Marjorie. "Have you any books, Mrs. Brown?"

"No books," she replied; "but a travellin' man left me some sample copies of magazines here a month or two ago. Want 'em?"

"Yes, indeed!" answered Marjorie; and Mrs. Brown promptly brought them.

All the afternoon the girls sat in the rickety, yet comfortable rocking chairs on the porch, and read the stories in the magazines. If they had not reached the goal of their desire, they were at least content.

Supper was ready about seven o'clock—by real time; for Mrs. Brown had switched the clock back while they were reading—and she gave them a very good meal. The girls enjoyed it immensely; and after supper they helped her with the dishes, walked around the farm with her brother, and went early to bed, with the promise of being awakened at five the next morning.

Their disappointment came, however, when Frieda awoke to find it broad daylight. She had no way of telling time, but she knew by the sun that it was long after five o'clock.

"And today's Tuesday!" she wailed. "Marj, we

were fools to stay! The whole world is against us, I believe. Oh, do hurry!"

The girls dressed quickly and descended to the darkness below.

"Oh, what time is it, Mrs. Brown, and why didn't you call us?" demanded Marjorie, in distress.

"It's half past seven," replied the woman. "But you need not get so impatient, for yer not a leavin' this here house today!"

"What do you mean?" asked Marjorie, in amazement. A quick, sudden pang of fear seized her: were they in a prizon again?

"I mean jest what I said! There was a man here to say that you are a runaway, and your father's offered a thousand dollars to whoever finds you, and the man's over to Beasley' tryin' to get your father on the telephone. So, if my brother and I kin keep you here, the old man's goin' fifty-fifty on the reward!"

Marjorie sank into a chair, overcome by the sense of the relentless fate that seemd to be pursuing and overtaking her. It was like a hideous dream: they were caught in a queer, unreal sort of net, from which there was no escape. She wondered whether the old man who had first announced the idea were not crazy; indeed, she felt that this must be the explanation of the matter. And yet he seemed to be very sane in all other respects.

She remembered reading of other demented

persons—rational on all but one subject, and obsessed by a certain idea. Evidently old Higgins had gone crazy on the subject of gold, and his diseased, avaricious mind had imagined this contingency. But why, oh, why, should she—poor, innocent Marjorie Wilkinson—be the victim? Especially when it meant so much to her to get to Silvertown by Wednesday, and to be in time to take part in the races!

In vain she protested that the facts were not true; that her father and mother knew exactly where she was and had given their full consent to the trip; but the woman only shook her head.

"It will not be for long. The old man promised me he'd be back tonight, no matter what happened. So it means only one more day. You can start early t'morrer mornin'."

"But that will be too late!" cried Marjorie, bursting into tears. "Oh, you are too cruel! You're not human beings; you're beasts! And I hope——"

"Marj, come upstairs," interrupted Frieda. She did not wish her companion to say anything for which she might later be sorry.

"I'll bring your breakfast up," said Mrs. Brown, calmly. "And you'd better stay upstairs, it's cooler. You can have the windows open there—there's no danger of you gettin' out so high up."

With Frieda's arm around her, Marjorie stumbled out of the room and up the stairs. Frieda was the stronger now, of the two, but it was only because

the thing did not touch her so deeply as it did her companion. Indeed, she suffered more for Marjorie's sake than for her own. The canoe race meant little to her, and the house-party less. The canoe trip had been the main event to her; she even shrank a little shyly at the idea of such an exclusive resort and so gorgeous a house. She feared that she might say and do the wrong things, and she dreaded Ruth's silent ridicule. But she realized how much it all meant to Marjorie.

Marjorie sank upon the bed, disconsolately refusing to eat. Frieda, however, partook of the breakfast, and then went over to examine the windows. Perhaps there might be another lattice.

But this old tumble-down house boasted of no such decoration, and if there had been one, it would no doubt have been so rotten that an attempt to descend by it would have been fatal. She sighed and turned away.

"We can see the creek plainly from this window," she said; "let's sit by it. Maybe somebody might come along, and we could call for help."

"We wouldn't dare—they'd hear us and persecute us all the more," objected Marjorie.

"If the scouts came, we could semaphore to them," remarked Frieda. "They'd be near enough to read it."

"*If* they came, Frieda!" repeated Marjorie, sarcastically. Nevertheless, she pulled a chair over to

the window, and sat down. For some minutes she gazed idly out of the window, watching the patches of light made by the bright morning sun flickering on the water. The ripple of the current, as the creek passed over the stones, was the only sound that broke the stillness on that summer morning.

"You can't see very far, though," she observed; "there must be a bend up there."

She got up from her chair and leaned against the narrow frame, in her endeavor to see as far as she could. For a moment the motion of the wind in the foliage deceived her; she thought she saw something coming, only, however, to find herself a minute later, disappointed.

She was still leaning in this position when suddenly her attitude became tense, alert, eager! Was she to be deluded again? She waited in breathless anticipation. From around the bend, she distinguished a narrow birch-bark canoe glide into view!

"Frieda!" gasped the excited girl, "somebody's coming!"

"Sh!" warned the other, rushing towards the window. "Don't scream! Oh, how shall we get their attention?" she looked wildly about the room for inspiration.

"There—get that red table-cover, and I'll wave it!" commanded Marjorie. "Oh, Frieda, look—he has a uniform! It's khaki color! Oh, if it—if it could be—Frieda, *It's a Boy Scout!*"

No discovery could possibly have brought a greater thrill to these desolate prisoners. For surely this meant delivery from captivity, freedom! If they could only attract his attention!

The canoe came nearer; they watched it in breathless suspense, both leaning far out of the window, and waving their arms, their red table-cover, even the ties of their uniforms. Fortunately, being a canoeist, the stranger approached them face to face; had he been rowing a boat, all their hopes of securing his attention would have been lost.

In spite of their wild attempts to attract his notice, the boy continued to look into the water until he advanced to within twenty yards of the house. But suddenly from the tree near by sounded the clear call of a king-fisher; and instantly he looked up toward the house. He missed the bird, but caught sight of the two girls, frantically signalling.

Frieda instantly put her finger to her lips, while Marjorie spelled out the word HELP in semaphore.

The boy stopped paddling, and wrinkled his forehead in uncertainty. What was the meaning of this? Had he read the message aright?

Assured now of the scout's interest, Marjorie began to send a longer message, to explain her meaning at length.

"We are two Girl Scouts held prisoners here. Please bring help. Not a word."

She repeated the entire message and waited

breathlessly. Then, to her infinite joy, she watched him signal back.

"Give me one hour! Courage!" he flashed, and, turning around, he returned whence he came.

With a great gasp of joy the girls sank to the floor exhausted.

CHAPTER XVIII

RUTH FINDS A PARTNER

Early Monday morning John Hadley and Jack Wilkinson drove one of Mr. Andrews's machines out of Silvertown, back by the quickest route to the farm-house. In his hand, Jack carried a map of the trip, and they followed the road that ran closest to the creek.

At the farm-house they met Mrs. Higgins, and asked anxiously for news of the girls. Overcome by a sense of remorse, she told them the whole story, just as it had occured. The boys listened with increasing anger.

"The man's crazy, of course!" cried Jack, fiercely. "Why, I'm her own brother——"

"Still, there may be a Margie Wilkinson missing —and not your sister," remarked the woman. "It's not such an uncommon name."

"Hardly likely, though. You haven't seen the old devil since?"

"Not a sign of 'im!" replied Mrs. Higgins. "But what I can't understand nohow is why the girls didn't reach Silvertown by now. They escaped here Sunday night, perty early, too, I reckon!"

"By George, the old nut must have caught them again!" roared John, beside himself with rage. "Come on, we haven't a moment to lose! Where's this town you spoke of? Let's go notify the police immediately."

"And shall I leave the girls' boat in the barn where the old man hid it?" she asked. "I found it yes'te'-day."

"Yes, we'll send a truck down for it later," said John. "We must be off now!"

Mrs. Higgins gave them directions how to reach Besley, and a description of the old man who seemed at the bottom of the affair. But although the constable at Besley remembered seeing the man, and the hotel-keeper showed them the name—Adam Jones—signed in a very shaky handwriting, he said he had not seen the old fellow for several days.

"He come over here a couple o' nights fer dinner," remarked the clerk. "But he didn't have much to say—except to pass the time o' day. Didn't say nuthin' about no runaway. I reckon he wanted to keep the reward fer hisself."

"Well, if you see him, you just lock him up!" cried John, vehemently. "He's nothing but a common kidnapper!"

"Easy now, young feller!" cautioned the constable. "The man may only be tryin' to obey the law and earn an honest reward. There might be other Margaret Wilkinsons, besides your sister!"

"But my sister's name is Marjorie!" contradicted Jack.

The constable shrugged his shoulders and turned away as if he did not attach much importance to the boys' assertions; they probably had their facts wrong, he surmised.

All day Monday the boys wandered about the woods, looking in vain for the lost girls. As it began to grow dark, John suggested a telegram to Mrs. Wilkinson.

"Mother and dad went for a motor trip," replied Jack; "and they won't be back till Tuesday or Wednesday. So it's no use now. But we can go out again tomorrow, and if we don't get any trace, we'll send word then. But, by the immortal gods, we've got to find them, John! I believe it would kill mother!"

Disconsolately, they drove back and entered the house just as the guests were answering the summons to dinner. Mr. Andrews and Mr. Remington had likewise met with no success, and the seriousness of the affair threw a cloud over the party.

Ruth had not enjoyed herself so thoroughly that day as she had expected. Very soon she noticed that the boys and girls began to pair off, or go in groups of fours, and she seemed left out. If she had entertained any hope of having John Hadley to herself while Marjorie was away, she was disappointed; for, of course, he was gone all day. And Jack Wil-

kinson's absence lent another trying aspect to the situation.

During the bathing hour, most of the party remained together, and at luncheon they wandered in and sat as they pleased. With Dick Roberts hovering near Lily, and Roger with no eyes for anyone but Doris, the only boy left of the old crowd was David Conner, and he seemed too much worried about Marjorie's absence to be an entertaining companion. Ruth's choice, was, therefore, narrowed to the new scouts, but unfortunately they seemed already taken with Frances, Ethel, Florence, and Alice. The girl suddenly felt herself ignored, an outsider; and she had no one but herself to blame!

But Ruth Henry was not a girl to demand pity or to allow others to think her unpopular. She therefore attached herself to Mr. and Mrs. Andrews, and talked entertainingly all through luncheon.

"The afternoon is an open one," said Mrs. Andrews, when the guests were all assembled on the porch a little later. "We had hoped to have a tea, so that you could meet some of the young people of Silvertown, but we have postponed it until Thursday in the hope that Marjorie and Frieda will be found. For no one is much in the mood of festivities with this hanging over us."

"I know what I'm going to do!" announced Ruth. "It's very unsociable, but it's got to be done. Practice canoeing all by myself!"

This was a clever stroke of Ruth's; it at the same time afforded her a good opportunity to improve her chances of winning on Wednesday, and freed her from any suspicion of unpopularity.

"I'm going to bed!" sighed Lily. "At least, if the guests will excuse me."

Several of the others signified their intentions of going walking or canoeing, and soon the party was completely scattered.

As the evening drew near, they all felt an unconscious tremor of excitement—of hope that the searchers might return with the missing girls, or at least with news of them. But one glance at their faces dispelled any illusions.

"All boys together tonight, and all girls together!" announced Mrs. Andrews, as they entered the dining room. She believed that this brief separation would add zest to the companionship of the evening.

When everybody was seated, John told his story in a tone loud enough to be heard all over the room. The news was far from welcome; indeed, Lily Andrews and Doris Sands became almost hysterical.

"We're going out again tomorrow, if we have Mr. Andrews' permission," he concluded; "and, by Jupiter! if we don't find them, we won't come back. We'll take plenty of money, and go armed, and stay out till we conquer, or die!"

His resolute spirit was applauded; everyone felt that he was thoroughly in earnest, and that he was,

moreover, the best one for the job. Ruth alone looked annoyed; events were not quite taking the course she had planned.

When the hostess announced a dance at the club house for any who wished to attend, Ruth again looked worried. She would be forced to remain at home, she knew; for none of the boys would ask her. She glanced shyly at Jack, but received no encouragement; the boy was worn out after the adventure of the day.

The whole party had just seated themselves comfortably on the porch when a Ford Sedan wound up the drive towards the house. Then, to Ruth's great astonishment and joy, she recognized Harold Mason at the wheel!

Mr. Andrews rose to meet him. Lifting his hat, the boy inquired whether Ruth Henry were not among the guests.

Already Ruth had jumped to her feet.

"Oh, Harold, I'm awfully glad to see you. How did you ever happen to be up here?"

"I've been visiting a chum in New York, and as I drove near, I thought of you and wondered whether I couldn't look you up as I passed. Why, here's Hadley, too! And Wilkinson! Is your sister here, Jack?"

Before the latter could reply, Ruth introduced the stranger to the rest of the party, and then hastened to tell the story about Marjorie and Frieda.

"I'm going to look for her!" cried Harold immediately, his voice filled with indignation. "I bet the old fellow was an escaped nut. Any asylums around here, Mr. Andrews?"

"I don't know—we're strangers here, too. But there is nothing you can do now, my boy. Our boys are going out again tomorrow, and if they do not have any success, we can get in touch with Mr. Wilkinson by evening. But won't you join our party? I'm sure Mrs. Andrews joins me in extending you a hearty invitation. There's a dance at the club house tonight."

"How jolly!" exclaimed Harold. "I'd love to, Mr. Andrews, at least, if—well—it's up to Ruth." Then, turning to her, he asked, "May I go with you? If not, I guess I'd better be on my way."

"Yes, indeed; if you have evening clothes," replied the girl.

"Of course I have; didn't I tell you I'd been visiting in New York?"

Ruth felt as if she had never been so glad in her life to see anyone as she was to see Harold. It was not only a relief to have a devoted attendant, but it afforded her a release from her own gloomy thoughts. For already the escapade was beginning to depress her. She really had never thought of the effect Marjorie's absence would cast upon the other guests; all she had thought of was the girl's own annoyance at the delay, and that reflection

brought her nothing but satisfaction. Marjorie had been too popular lately; she was having things her own way entirely too much. It was not good for any one girl to receive so much attention, Ruth thought; for the sake of the others in the troop, as well as for herself, she had regarded her prank as veritably charitable. But now she was almost beginning to regret it. For she knew that when the girl did finally appear, she would be the petted heroine of the party even though Ruth herself might win the cup. And who knew? Mr. Andrews might even suggest that the winner compete with Marjorie and Frieda! It was a strange thing that Ruth Henry had not learned by this time that her underhand scheming never got her anywheres. But each time she seemed to forget, and tried her mean practices all over again.

She could hardly wait to be alone with Harold, to talk the thing over from beginning to end. Fortunately, the others went earlier, while she waited for him to dress.

He was not absent long, however, for he, too, was eager to tell her about the adventure.

"By George! you look stunning, Ruth, in that white fluffiness!" he exclaimed, as he threw her cloak around her shoulders.

"You should have said 'By Georgette,'" corrected Ruth; "because that's what my dress is made of!"

She linked her arm through his, and they started

down the steps. Harold was blissfully happy; he knew that he had accomplished something worthwhile for her. He hoped to see her win the meet on Wednesday; perhaps, after such a success, he might be able to come to an understanding with her. For Ruth Henry was very attractive, he thought, and although only seventeen, she was undoubtedly the sort of girl to become engaged very young.

However, he said nothing of all this now. Instead, he told her the whole story, just as it had happened, allowing her to realize the perils he had gone through for her sake.

"And you don't think she'll ever suspect?" asked Ruth, trembling at the daring of it all.

"Never!"

"Harold!" She laid her other hand over his arm. "You have been wonderful; and I can never thank you enough. But will you promise me one thing more?"

"Absolutely anything!"

"That if she ever should find out, you'll say it was your own idea to help me, and that I never knew a thing about it?"

Harold laughed. "Oh, yes, Ruth, if you wish. But Marjorie will never find out."

They ascended the steps of the broad clubhouse and found the dancing already in progress. Hastily disposing of their wraps, they joined the merry throng and were soon lost amid the crowd.

During the intermission that followed, Mrs. Andrews brought four young people of Silvertown to meet them. Two of them, Jeanne and Eloise Trowbridge, occupied the cottage next to theirs, and one of the young men, Griffith Hunter, lived across the street. Ruth became more animated than ever, and dances were exchanged. Harold all the while watched her jealously, for she seemed immensely infatuated with young Mr. Hunter.

The evening passed quickly. Ruth was again with Harold on their way home. But her thoughts were no longer with him, but rather against him; for she was ready to send him home.

"Tomorrow," she decided, "I'll speak to Mrs. Andrews; for if he hangs around, I'll never get a chance to see any other boys. And besides, he's served his purpose."

She turned to her companion to say goodnight. But something in his look, his tone, softened her heart, and she squeezed his hand affectionately.

"After all, he might as well stay till the meet is over," she thought; "for he really has earned it."

CHAPTER XIX

THE RESCUE

John Hadley and Jack Wilkinson left on Tuesday morning long before the girls were up. They decided first of all to go back to the farm house and ask about the path beside the creek, and then to go over it, every inch of the way, on foot. And then if they still found no traces, they meant to get a detective.

For the situation was now thoroughly alarming. The girls had probably been kidnapped, and hidden somewheres by the old man who was seeking the reward. Perhaps they were even suffering some sort of torture!

The boys reached the farm house about seven thirty. Jack stayed in the machine, driving it very slowly, while John ran on ahead. In a minute he joined his companion; unfortunately Mrs. Higgins still had no news of the girls or of the stranger.

"She says there's a road—not far from the foot-path," said John, "so you drive on, and I'll walk, I hardly think this is going to help us any, but we may as well follow it out as quickly as possible and then go to Besley again for a detective."

They proceeded thus for about four miles, progressing very carefully, and watching for canoes, and girls and empty barns and houses where they might be hidden. They were quite near to the very house where the girls were imprisoned when they encountered a Boy Scout. He ran out from the path, and placed himself in front of the machine, all the while waving his hands frantically.

"Stop! Stop!" he cried; and just as Jack brought the car to a stand-still, John scampered over from the wood-path, to hear what the commotion was about.

"I see you're a Scout!" said John, saluting, and extending his hand for a hand-shake. "What can we do to help you?"

"It's a girl—in trouble!" he explained. "She's held prisoner up in a farm-house beside the creek. In fact, there are two girls. I——"

Jack was out of the machine in a flash. Wildly, he grasped the boy's arm.

"It's my sister!" he cried. "Tell us, quick!"

"Well, I don' know why she's held there, but she sent me a semaphore message to get help. She must be a Girl Scout to know the code, I mean."

"Did she have light hair and brown eyes?" questioned John, almost shouting his words in his excitement.

"Search me!" replied the other. "Her hair is

light—she's pretty, too. But I don't know about the color of her eyes!"

"It must be Marj!" said Jack. "Oh, I know it is! Oh, don't let's waste a minute!"

"Come on in the machine!" cried John. "Can we drive right up to the door,——?"

"Bob Felton's my name," replied the other. "Yes, we can drive right up to the porch. But I wish we had a pistol! Maybe the people are crazy!"

Jack patted his pocket significantly. "We've each got a gun," he said.

"By Jimmy, if I get my hands on that fellow, I'll choke him till his eyes fall out," raged John, furious with anger.

Jack drove his machine as fast as he dared over the uneven road for about half a mile; then, directed by Bob Felton, he turned down a narrow path which led to the creek.

"That's the place!" cried Bob suddenly. "See it?"

"That hole? Why, it's not fit for a dog!"

"Hadn't we better stop the machine here under cover, and sneak up on them?" suggested Bob.

"Nix!" replied John. "We drive right up to the house; we're going to claim them—not steal 'em back again. I guess they've already heard our engine, anyway."

Boldly, Jack drove directly to the front of the house, or rather, until a rickety fence barred further progress, and suddenly applied the brakes. A dirty,

mongrel hound came racing out from the back, barking furiously. But the boys never hesitated. Before the machine had come to a halt, John was out of it; and not waiting to pass through the gate, he vaulted the fence with a bound and strode across the intervening space of yard to the door, keeping his hand on the revolver in his side pocket. Nor were the other two boys far behind him. Unmindful of the mangy cur which noisily threatened an assault upon their legs from the rear, they were at John's heels when he sprang up the steps of the porch.

The widow Brown, having heard them approach and thinking all the while that it was the old man who had returned, appeared suddenly in the doorway just as John had raised his clenched hand to pound upon the door.

John was somewhat taken aback upon being thus unexpectedly confronted by a woman when he had expected to see a man, and with his fist arrested in mid-air, he blurted out,

"Where—where—we want the two girls who are prisoners here! Where are they?"

The woman shrank back in consternation before the look of righteous wrath on the face of the young man who, with upraised hand, appeared about to strike her. She trembled violently, and wondered whether she should call to her brother, who was out in the stable and had evidently not heard the quiet motor of the big machine when it approached. But

knowing her guilt, her terror at the determined attitude of the three boys prevented her from uttering a sound, and before she could even stammer a reply to John's question, Marjorie and Lily, having heard his stern voice demanding them, came bounding down the stairs.

"Why—why—sir—oh, do have mercy!" begged Mrs. Brown, sinking in a heap at the boys' feet. But the girls, hardly noticing her, stepped over her, and rushed toward the boys.

"Thank Heaven!" cried Marjorie, flinging her arms around her brother's neck, and laughing and crying at the same time. Frieda, in her turn, grasped the hand of the unknown scout, and squeezed it gratefully.

"Let's get away at once!" begged Marjorie. "I can't stand it here another minute!"

"Suppose you all wait a minnit!" called a voice behind them.

Turning quickly, they beheld the man of the place standing beside the machine, the sharp points of his pitchfork resting against a tire, as if he were about to damage it.

"Get away from that machine, you contemptible skunk!" shouted John, advancing towards him.

The man raised his pitchfork threateningly.

"Throw down that fork, or I'll let daylight into you!" cried John, whipping out his revolver.

At the sight of the weapon, the man became in-

stantly cowed; he tossed the fork hastily away from him.

"Now come over here and explain yourself," ordered the boy.

"I ain't done nuthin'," whined the other, entering nevertheless through a break in the fence.

"Ain't done nuthin'!" mimicked John. "You've kidnapped two innocent girls, a crime that's punishable by a long term of imprisonment. Don't you call that something? What's the big idea, anyhow?"

The man cringed at these words, displaying even less courage than his sister had; but seeing that John was replacing his revolver in his pocket, he took heart again.

"No, I didn't, neither!" he replied; and he proceeded to relate the whole story, all the while proclaiming that he was innocent.

"But who is this old man?" demanded Jack. "Surely you know him!"

"I never saw him before in my life!" declared the man.

"Nor I!" chimed in his sister.

"Is there an insane asylum anywheres around?" asked Jack.

"No nearer than twenty-five miles," answered Mrs. Brown.

"Well, let this be a lesson to you. You deserve to be punished; but since we are going away quickly,

we'll let the matter drop. But it was a mean, contemptible trick!" concluded Jack.

The young people quickly got into the machine and drove off. Completely exhausted after their severe mental strain, the girls could not even relax; they alternately laughed and cried all the way home.

Though the boys were tremendously happy over their success, John was a trifle disappointed at Marjorie's almost total disregard of him. She was dazed, but so thankful that her brother was with her; indeed she seemed to lean entirely upon him. Frieda, on the other hand, gave all the credit to Bob Felton, who was, in her mind, their real deliverer. She had not been so distressed over the affair as Marjorie, and she was calmer now.

In less than half an hour they drove into the grounds. The greater part of the party were bathing, but the older people were sitting on the porch.

With a cry of joy, Marjorie jumped out of the machine and embraced Miss Phillips; in the presence of her captain the girl seemed to gain something of her old self-control. It was then that Marjorie finally realised that Mr. and Mrs. Andrews were responsible for the whole trip, and that the palatial house was to be theirs.

"Oh, I'm so glad we're going to have the whole week," she said. "Thanks to our new friend and deliverer—Robert Felton!"

"Yes, and you're in time for the meet tomorrow,"

added Mrs. Andrews. "And we shall be glad to have you stay," she turned toward the boy, hospitably—"are you far from home?"

"Not very," replied Bob. "We live at Besley."

"Then you can join our party?"

"Oh, do!" pleaded Frieda, for already she felt as if he were an old friend.

"There's a canoe meet on hand for tomorrow," put in Mr. Andrews. "And tennis matches for Thursday and Friday. The boys are to take part in them, too,—they're to be mixed doubles."

The boy's eyes shone with anticipation; the program was decidedly to his liking.

"I'd love to stay," he said, enthusiastically. "May I go call mother on the telephone? I'll need some clothes——"

The mention of his mother brought Marjorie back to her own situation.

"Thank goodness my mother didn't know what happened to us!" she said, fervently. "If she had, it would have worried her to death."

"By Jupiter, I'm going to phone dad tonight, though!" announced Jack, "so that he can get on that old nut's trail. I'll never rest till the mystery's solved!"

"No, for the man may go right on persecuting other girls," remarked Mr. Andrews.

The sound of gay voices from the driveway interrupted the conversation.

"Wait till they see you!" chuckled Jack. "Won't they get the surprise of their lives!"

"The most joyful one, too," added Mrs. Andrews. "At least, it will be for Lily."

The party now emerged from the trees which had hidden them from view of the porch. Alice Endicott was the first to become aware of their presence.

"They're found!" she shrieked, darting forward. "Oh, look, people,—Marj and Frieda!"

Instantly they all began to run towards the porch. Lily was the first to throw her arms around Marjorie. Kisses, embraces, questions, and explanations followed in such rapid succession that Mrs. Andrews had to call for order amidst the wild confusion.

"Have mercy on the poor girls!" she entreated. "Remember Marjorie and Frieda have been under a terrible strain."

In the interval that followed, Marjorie had an opportunity to study Ruth's face. The girl was vainly striving for control; she was attempting with that artificial smile of hers to cover the feeling in her heart. But Marjorie knew her well enough to read her like a book.

"Ruth's disappointed," she thought to herself; "of course she didn't want Frieda or me to compete tomorrow."

She was surprised to find Harold Mason most cordial, for she knew he had never liked her. He

even went out of his way to come over to the couch hammock where she was seated, and start a conversation with her, asking her all about her experiences. But she longed to forget all about it; so, at the first opportunity, she changed the subject.

"By the way, you aren't a scout, are you?" she asked him. as they watched Bob Felton reappear from the house.

"Hardly!" he replied, loftily. "I'm a college man!"

"Yes, I know," said Marjorie; "but so is John, yet he still considers himself a scout, don't you, John?"

"Indeed I do!" answered the young man, glad to be noticed again by Marjorie. "Once a scout, always a scout, even though you are too old to be an active member."

"I'm not one of the party," explained Harold. "I just dropped in as I passed by, to see Ruth. I'm leaving tomorrow."

Marjorie glanced at Ruth for the reason for this assertion, for she knew that the hospitable host and hostess would be glad to include him in their party, had Ruth desired it. She saw however that the latter was deeply engrossed in Griffith Hunter, a wealthy young regular at Silvertown, and evidently had no eyes for Harold.

Marjorie and Frieda and some of the others went to their rooms while Ruth took the former's place on

the couch hammock, conveying with her eyes an invitation for Griffith to join her. But instead he lighted a cigarette, and leaned against the porch rail.

Griffith Hunter was a typical youth of the topmost round of society. Though conventional and reserved, he possessed at the same time a certain naive charm that made him attractive for his own sake, aside from his position and wealth. A freshman at Harvard, a member of the inner circle of society, a resident of Silvertown, he seemed to Ruth to be everything desirable in a young man.

"If I could only get him to ask me to be his partner in the mixed-doubles," she thought, "that would make up for losing my other scheme."

With this end in view she therefore started to talk about tennis. But the young man listened only half-heartedly; his thoughts seemed to have flown in a different direction.

"A remarkably pretty girl!" he observed, as Marjorie's name was mentioned by someone near him.

Every nerve in Ruth's body called out in protestation against his remark, but, hiding her jealousy, she replied sweetly,

"Yes, isn't she? Marj is my best friend—we come from the same town."

"I'd like to see more of her," he added, almost as if he were thinking aloud. Then, as he moved towards the steps,

"So sorry I can't stay for luncheon; but mother's

expecting some friends and requested my presence. So, if you'll excuse me, I'll go over now. See you tomorrow, at the meet!"

And Ruth inwardly raged at the fate that alway seemed to award her second place.

CHAPTER XX

GRIFFITH'S CHOICE

All during dinner Ruth watched Marjorie's ever increasing popularity with a sense of irritation. And after the party adjourned to the porch the talk was of nothing but the experiences of her hated rival.

"Are you too tired to go to the dance tonight, Marjorie?" asked John Hadley, with concern.

Marjorie smiled peacefully; it was so pleasant just to be able to do as she pleased. She settled herself comfortably in the cushioned wicker chair, and half closed her eyes in contentment.

"No, thanks, John; I believe I'll stay right here tonight, and rest. For I want to take part in the meet tomorrow afternoon."

Ruth frowned unconsciously; already she saw her chance of winning the cup, and with it the prestige the victory would carry, vanishing from her grasp. She longed so much to be included among the intimate friends of the Trowbridge girls, and to be interesting to Griffith Hunter. Thus far, she had made no progress; not a single boy, except Harold, had shown her any attention. She might

almost as well have remained at home. Marjorie, absent or present, was always the center of interest. Making a great effort to conceal her annoyance, she glanced at the group about her in the hope that John, or Jack,—or anyone except Harold—might invite her to accompany him to the dance.

But John Hadley's next remark despelled any such hope as far as he was concerned.

"I believe I'll stay at home then," he declared. "I guess I'm pretty tired, too. How about you, Wilkinson?"

"Me for bed!" exclaimed Jack, with feeling.

The groups began to talk among themselves, and in a moment Ruth found her ever-present admirer at her side.

"Will you go with me tonight?" whispered Harold.

The girl glanced at the landscape in front of her, the lovely lawn, the feathery trees, and the moon just beginning to peep through them. What a night! If only there were some way to succeed in obtaining Griffith Hunter as her partner. But the young man had not put in an appearance since the morning, and in all probability he intended to take one of the Trowbridge girls. So Ruth sighed, and decided to accept the only invitation she was likely to secure.

"Boys and girls!" said Mrs. Andrews, abruptly interrupting the general buzz of conversation in all parts of the veranda, "Will you please make up your

minds about the tennis matches, and let Mr. Andrews know by tomorrow afternoon? The preliminaries are to be played off Thursday and Friday morning, and the finals Friday afternoon."

"What tennis matches?" cried Marjorie, in delight. She had heard nothing of the tournament up to that time.

"I guess Mr. Andrews had better tell you all about it," replied the hostess. "He understands the game better than I do."

"All right," said her husband, "but there isn't much to explain. We thought we'd keep it a mixed doubles match, so everyone may choose their own partner. You are privileged to take someone of our party, or a friend from Silvertown. But let me have the entries by tomorrow afternoon."

"Suppose a boy chooses a girl who has already chosen another boy before?" asked Ruth. "What then?"

"Well, I think it would be best for the boys to do the asking—just as you do at a dance," put in Mrs. Andrews. "But any boy who doesn't want to ask a girl may just hand his name in to Mrs. Andrews. And likewise a girl who isn't asked by any one in particular, will be provided with a partner."

"What fun!" cried Marjorie. "Oh, I do wish I were a better player."

Ruth said nothing; she knew that her chances of winning were good, could she but obtain a skillful

partner. Harold played rather well, but not remarkably. It was Ruth's dream to take the whole match without losing a single set, to come off with such a spectacular victory that her triumph would dull the brilliancy of any success Marjorie might win in the canoe meet. For Ruth had often beaten Marjorie in singles; and there was hardly another girl to fear among the scouts.

Before long the groups began to disappear from the porch and stroll along the winding driveway in twos and fours towards the club house. Mr. Remington and Miss Phillips chaperoned the dancers, while Mr. and Mrs. Andrews remained at home with Marjorie and Frieda, and three or four of the boys. Ruth and Harold were the last to leave.

"Ruth, may I stay and play the tennis match with you?" he asked as soon as they were out of hearing distance from the porch.

"Don't you think, Harold, that it's imposing on the Andrews to stay so long?" Ruth returned, a little sharply. "That would keep you here till Saturday, you know!"

Harold wrinkled his forehead. What did Ruth mean by suddenly becoming so solicitious about her hostess's wishes?

"But I was invited!"

"Well, for my part, I wouldn't want to be under such obligations to total strangers. But, of course, if you don't mind——"

"Ruth!" He took her arm in an effort to make her walk more slowly. "You don't want me to stay!"

"Don't hold my arm, Harold," she said, pulling it away. "It's so conspicuous."

"It isn't fair, Ruth, that you should treat me so coolly. Just look what I've done for you—bribed, and lied, and——"

"That's it! Tell me how much it has cost you!" snapped the girl. "Rub it in, all you like!"

"Oh, please!" his voice was hurt, reproving. "How can you say such things?"

"I'm sorry, Harold," she apologized, softening her tone, and putting her arm through his. "You did a lot, and risked all sorts of dangers—but after all, you failed. And a miss is as good as a mile, you know. In fact, I think the whole thing did more harm than good, for Marjorie is more of a heroine than ever!"

"It's true," admitted the boy, disconsolately; "and now you turn me aside for this new fellow!"

"What new fellow?" A momentary smile of satisfaction passed over the girl's face. If only Harold's words were true!

"Why—what's his name—Hunter!"

"He isn't a special friend of mine," said Ruth. "In fact, I believe he's quite smitten with Marj!"

"But you're crazy to play the tennis match with him as your partner!"

"Only because I heard he's a wonderful player. No, what I want is to win—something! And if I can't get the canoe meet, I want to stand a chance in the tennis tournament."

They were entering the club grounds now. Crossing the smooth, treeless lawn of the golf links, they were afforded a splendid view of the moon rising towards the center of the sky. Again Ruth forgot her companion in contemplation of the beauty of the scene. Harold said nothing until they reached the steps of the club house. Then he stopped short.

"Ruth!" he exclaimed, with one of his sudden bursts of inspiration, "I have it! We'll kidnap Marj again! I'll take her out in the machine tomorrow morning, and get stalled, so that she misses the meet."

"Good idea," said Ruth, indifferently. "But of course she won't go. Marj doesn't like you."

"I'll offer to take her to the bathing beach, so as to save her strength for the afternoon. Perhaps she'll bite."

Ruth shrugged her shoulders; she did not attach much hope to the plan. "If you like," she remarked. Then, starting up the steps, "Come on in, Harold! If people see us standing here, they might talk."

"And that," said the boy, bitterly, "would spoil your chances."

"Don't be silly!"

Harold followed Ruth up the steps and they entered the softly lighted dance hall. The music was playing, but there were not many dancing; for in spite of the electric fans and the open windows, the atmosphere was warm aand oppressive.

Ruth looked searchingly for her new friends, but saw only two or three casual acquaintances among the Silvertown group. Evidently Griffith Hunter was not there. So she surrendered herself to a dull evening tete-a-tete with Harold, with perhaps a few dances with some of the scouts, and made no attempt to be entertaining. In reality, her partner was relieved when she finally suggested that they go home.

Marjorie, on the contrary, with much less effort on her part, passed a most agreeable evening at home. Lily, who had refused to leave her for any length of time, soon persuaded Dick Roberts to take her back to the house. Frieda and her new friend, Bob Felton, had gone for a canoe ride on the lake; so Marjorie and Lily, with four of the boys, had the porch to themselves.

"I'm going to try to get dad on the phone!" announced Jack. "And then I believe I'll turn in. Come on with me, Hadley."

John rose reluctantly, as if he had no desire to leave Marjorie with David Conner. All evening he had been trying in vain to find a chance to ask her to be his partner in the tennis tournament; now he was afraid that David would seize the opportun-

ity his absence afforded to ask the very question.

Perhaps David would have done so, had it not been for Dick Roberts. Perceiving John's disinclination to leave the group, Dick instantly surmised his reason and came to the rescue by talking incessantly to Marjorie for some time. Before he had stopped, Griffith Hunter appeared at the steps.

"Hello, Hunter!" called David, cheerily. "Come on up."

"Thanks," replied the young man. "I haven't long to stay."

"You've met Miss Wilkinson, haven't you, Mr. Hunter?" asked Lily.

"Yes, indeed!" he replied. "And it was for that very reason that I came over. I want to ask you, Miss Wilkinson—" he bowed slightly—"whether you would do me the honor of playing in the tennis tournament with me?"

John Hadely appeared through the screen door just in time to hear this invitation. He stood perfectly still, in amazement at the boldness, the assurance of this young aristocrat. Surely Marjorie would resent such an attitude!

But to his surprise, Marjorie nodded gaily. "I'll be delighted," she said. "I made up my mind to accept the first partner who asked me. And really"—she looked shyly at David—"I was beginning to be afraid I'd have to stay out."

"Then, Lily," exclaimed Dick, turning to the

other girl, "I ask you right now. The early bird—"

"So you mean to imply I'm a worm," she retorted, haughtily. Then, laughing, "Well, I guess I am when it comes to tennis. You won't find me much of a partner, Dick."

"Oh, Jack, what's the news?" cried Marjorie, suddenly noticing her brother again.

"Dad and mother are still away," he replied, briefly. "And now, if you'll excuse me, I believe I'll turn in."

Griffith Hunter was persuaded to join the party and spend the remainder of the evening with them. When he finally left them, and strolled down the driveway towards the gate, he came upon Ruth and Harold, returning from the dance.

"Hello!" he greeted them. "Awfully sorry to have missed you, Miss Henry!"

"I'm sorry too," replied Ruth.

A moment later she joined the girls on the stairs. "Griffith Hunter was over to see me tonight, wasn't he?" she remarked to Marjorie. "Too bad I was away. He didn't stay long, did he?"

"Just long enough to ask me to be his partner in the tennis tournament," replied Marjorie, with an amused smile.

XXI

A SECOND ATTEMPT.

WEDNESDAY, the day of the canoe meet, had come at last! Marjorie awakened with a sense of anticipation: she was extremely happy. For she was free to take part in the contest!

"Hello, Marj! You awake?" called Doris, from the single bed beside her. "Aren't you glad it's clear?"

"I certainly am!" replied the girl; "and I'm glad I'm here."

"I am too. Oh, Marj, I surely do hope you get that cup!"

"Why, Doris, what about yourself? Don't you want to win it?"

Doris reached for her kimona and proceeded to get out of bed.

"You know I don't stand a chance," she said; "so I'd rather have you win it."

"It's awfully sweet of you," murmured Marjorie, as she, too, started to dress.

"Do you feel all right—rested, I mean?" pursued Doris.

"Yes, indeed; I'm going in bathing this morning."

The party had never been so gay, so care-free, so

hilarious, as it was that morning, gathered at one long breakfast table. The shadow of anxiety had been lifted, and the day, with its bright plans, promised to be most delightful. Marjorie seemed the most joyful of the group. Perhaps this was because of the contrast of the present scene to those of the preceding several days.

"Did you dream about your old man last night, Marjorie?" asked Mrs. Andrews.

"Indeed, I didn't," replied the girl, heartily. "I had a good sleep; all I dreamed about was the lovely time we are going to have today—and the rest of the week."

"If it only doesn't rain," observed Bob Felton. "With such heat——"

"Oh, come now, don't be a kill-joy, Felton!" remonstrated Jack. "It isn't gonig to shower."

"I hope you're right, Jack," sighed Marjorie. "Wouldn't it be awful if we couldn't have the canoe meet, after all our experiences!"

"Oh, we'd have it," reassured Mrs. Andrews. "And if all of the afternoons are planned for, we'll schedule it for a morning."

The talk drifted to tennis, and Ruth noticed with uneasiness that couples were pairing up. In the hope that John Hadley might ask her, she deferred giving her final answer to Harold. For although Marjorie was to play with Griffith Hunter, it would

still be a triumph to oppose her in league with such a partner as John.

"You girls who are taking part in the canoe meet this afternoon had better take things easy this morning," advised Mrs. Andrews. "From what I heard your captain tell of the program, it's to be pretty strenuous!"

"But it won't matter if we go in bathing, will it?" asked Marjorie, who longed for the refreshing coolness of the lake.

"No, that should not tire you," answered Miss Phillips; "at least, if you don't swim much."

The more energetic members of the party spent the early part of the morning on the tennis courts, practicing with their new partners. Ruth put on her bathing suit early to try a little rescue work, and Frances went with her to the lake. But Marjorie was content to lie in the hammock with a magazine until twelve o'clock.

With the exception of Ruth and Frances and two or three of the boys, all of the young people assembled on the porch about half-past twelve, clad in their bathing suits and raincoats. Harold was standing beside his car, holding the door open.

"And might I have the honor to drive our brave heroines to the lake?" he asked, with a deep bow.

Marjorie hesitated a moment, and Doris answered for her.

"Yes, that's a good idea, Harold," she said.

"These girls need all the rest they can get. Jump in, Marj—and Frieda!"

The girls laughingly obeyed, and Harold followed them. Before the rest of the party had even left the steps, the Ford had reached the gate.

"How far is it to the lake?" asked Marjorie.

"About ten minutes' walk I should judge," replied the boy. "I guess we can make it in two."

"Oh, Mr. Mason!" said Frieda, who had been carefully watching the young man's manipulation of the car, "could I possibly drive? I always wanted to, and never had a chance to learn."

Harold's eyes brightened; fate seemed almost to be playing into his hands.

"Certainly," he said, pleasantly. "But not on this road—there's too much traffic. Shall I turn back to that unfrequented one near the woods?"

"Would you mind, Marj?" asked Frieda, turning toward her companion. "Just for about fifteen minutes——"

"Certainly not!" said Marjorie. " I didn't want to stay in the lake long. Just so long as I get my dip, and we get back to the house by quarter after one, so that I can dress in time for lunch. So, go ahead, if you want to!"

Frieda moved to the front of the car and Harold began to explain in detail the workings of the machine. So fascinated was she that she hardly noticed how far they had gone or how lovely the road was.

"By the way, we haven't any watches!" exclaimed Marjorie. "How shall we know what time it is?"

"Oh, we won't stay long," said Harold. "Besides, I know a short cut back, through the town district—we're really driving around the outskirts, I think."

Harold stopped the car now, and Frieda moved over to the wheel. With all the tremulous earnestness of the novice, she allowed the car to wobble from side to side.

"Oh, do be careful, Frieda!" warned Marjorie. "We'll hit a tree, I'll bet!"

"No, we won't!" said Harold, calmly. "Miss Hammer is really doing very well. Now let's see if you know how to stop!"

Frieda accordingly proceeded to demonstrate her ability along this line, stopping and starting about fifteen times in succession, and usually stalling her motor by the way. All this consumed time, as Harold realized to his satisfaction. Glancing at the speedometer, he ascertained that, even with this interrupted progress, they had already covered three miles. Figuring from the position of the sun, and the length of time they had been out, he decided it must be nearly one-thirty.

"Don't you think we had better turn back?" suggested Marjorie, who was beginning to feel rather hungry. "It must be getting late."

"This road ought to take us back to the other end of Silvertown, if we keep on the same way we are

going," replied Harold. "But if you stop a minute, I'll look under the back seat for my map. That ought to tell us."

"Do I have to stop?" entreated Frieda. "Please let me keep on running it till we get back to civilization!"

Harold deliberated a moment. Ordinarily, he would not have considered taking such a chance as allowing a novice to run his Ford, even for a few seconds, without his hand beside the wheel to grasp it in case of an accident. But now he was willing to risk almost anything which might make for delay. The meet was called for three o'clock; even if Marjorie did get there in time, she could not exercise on an empty stomach, nor yet could she swim right after eating. His plans were working beautifully; perhaps, after all, he might succeed.

"You run slowly, then," he finally said to Frieda, "while Marjorie and I look for the map. But please be very careful!"

The new driver felt quite sure of herself, and went ahead slowly, while Marjorie and Harold rummaged under the back seat for the map. Among the tools, oil cans, and dirty rags, Marjorie suddenly caught sight of a piece of grey wig.

"What's this?" she demanded with curiosity, holding up the straggly hair. "Do you wear a wig, Harold, or false whiskers?"

Every bit of color left the boy's face, as he beheld

the tell-tale object. Wildly he sought for an explanation.

"Oh—that! Why—I'm in a play—an old grandfather, you know——"

He turned to the map, which he had just managed to locate, and busied himself in contemplation of it.

"Say, Frieda," continued Marjorie, still looking at the wig, "this sort of reminds me of our old friend. Look!"

The temptation was too much for the girl; forgetful of her occupation, her head swung around instantly to behold the object of Marjorie's interest. But in that second she lost control of her wheel; the car swerved to the left, and before she could put on the emergency, plunged headlong into a tree. With a crash, the front of the radiator cracked, and the water began to run out from the leak.

"Oh, oh!—What have I done?" she gasped, in terror.

Though rather appalled at the damage, Harold realized in a flash that the accident had accomplished two ends: it would serve to make Marjorie forget about the grey hair, and his embarrassment over its discovery; and it would render it impossible for Marjorie and Frieda to take part in the meet. For they had now gone almost five miles on a lonely road where few machines even passed by, and from all calculations it should be two o'clock. The girls could

not make the journey, have their lunch, and be ready for the meet by three. His victory was assured; Ruth would have to admit that he was clever. And, besides, he was all the while seemingly innocent.

"Don't worry, Miss Hammer," he said politely. "It can easily be fixed."

At these words he got out of the machine, and went around to the front to examine the damage. It was even worse than he had surmised; it would be impossible to get back now without a tow.

"But we'll miss the meet," sobbed Frieda, now almost in hysterics. "To think that after all we've gone through——"

"Oh, cheer up! Maybe there will be a machine along," said Harold. "Anyway, you girls can start to walk; perhaps it isn't so far. I'll have to stay here with the car. When you get to Silvertown, will you send someone from the garage?"

"But we've got bathing shoes on," continued Frieda. "Oh Marj, we can't make it—not possible!" The girl began to cry afresh.

"Not if we stand here all day," said Marjorie, a little sharp. She was disappointed, dismayed at the turn the events had taken. It was hard to see the silver cup almost within her grasp, and then to lose it through no fault of her own.

"Sorry to leave you, Harold," she said. "But we'll send help. So long——"

"Goodbye!" he answered, in a tone of assumed distress.

The girls began to walk very fast, breaking now and then into a run, and talking little, in order to save their breath.

"If we only had a watch!" sighed Marjorie, after they had gone about half a mile.

"You'll never forgive me, will you, Marj?" wailed Frieda again. In her own mind, she was the chief of sinners.

"Nonsense, Frieda; it was an accident. Oh, look, the sun's gone in! Now we can't possibly tell the time."

"I'm baked!" cried Frieda, stopping suddenly. "I can't stand this raincoat another minute!"

"Nor I either!" agreed Marjorie; and both girls took them off.

"There's a house ahead!" announced Marjorie, about ten minutes later. "If we could only get a piece of bread——"

"And find out what time it is," added the other.

All the while the atmosphere was growing heavier and stiller, and the clouds blacker and blacker. So hot, so tired, so hungry were the girls, however, that they hardly noticed the approaching storm. Keeping their eyes fixed on the house in the distance, they walked with grim determination toward their goal.

The house, though not large, was attractive and

well-kept, and the girls greeted it with a sigh of relief.

"I hope we won't be kidnapped if we dare to go in," said Marjorie, jokingly.

A pleasant faced woman answered their knock. In a few hurried words, Marjorie told the story, and asked for the time, and for a drink.

"Five minutes of three!" answered the woman, glancing at the clock.

"We've lost out!" gasped Frieda. "In five minutes the canoe meet starts!"

"Not if I know it!" said the woman cheerily, throwing wide open the door. "Just look at that rain! Come on inside, or you'll catch your death of cold!"

And so a second time Harold Mason's attempt to help Ruth came to naught.

CHAPTER XXII

THE STORM

When the young people reached the bathing beach, they were surprised not to find Frieda and Marjorie already there. Nor was there a sign of a Ford car

"A puncture, I'll bet!" laughed Ruth. "Harold always does have the worst luck. Remember that time, Jack——"

"Indeed, I do!" he replied. "And weren't we mad, though! Marj profited by the delay then, didn't she? But not this time."

"Well, she and Frieda can easily walk, unless they insist on helping Harold," said Lily. "I hope they come soon."

But when half an hour had passed, and they had not put in an appearance, Lily grew anxious.

"Suppose that crazy fool got them again," she said.

"Oh, Harold could easily beat him up," remarked Ruth; "he's strong."

"But crazy people are supposed to have extraordinary strength!"

"Everybody in to shore!" called Mr. Remington at this moment. "Time to go home."

One by one, the members of the party came out of the lake and prepared to leave the beach.

"What time is it, Mr. Remington?" asked John Hadley.

"Five minutes after one."

"Something has happened!" cried Lily, in a terror-stricken voice. "Oh, why did we ever let them out of our sight?"

All this time Ruth could hardly suppress the feeling of exultation that was taking possession of her. Was Harold really succeeding? Might she win after all? Then she felt a momentary pang of fear lest the accident, whatever it was, might be too obvious, and Marjorie's keen mind might discover an underlying motive. But after all, the possibility of such a thing was slight; Harold was too clever for that.

All the joyousness of the breakfast party had vanished when the guests assembled for their noon-day meal. The subject was all absorbing; on one talked of anything else.

"What I can't understand is why we didn't pass them on the road," said Jack. "If anything had happened to the machine, we ought to have seen it."

"That's true, unless they went for a little spin," said Ruth.

"And what time is the meet?" asked David, un-

consciously voicing the question that was uppermost in everybody's mind.

"Three o'clock," replied Mrs. Andrews.

"Felton," said John Hadley; "will you go out on a search party with me after lunch? You were successful before——"

"I'll be only too glad to go," replied the other, without the least hesitation.

Ruth glanced up, disappointed at this suggestion, for it would probably mean that John Hadley would not see the meet. A large part of the fun in victory was, to her way of thinking, the satisfaction of having her success witnessed and applauded. She had always longed, too, to be admired by John Hadley. However, she remembered that she need not regret his absence too deeply, for Griffith would be there. And undoubtedly, the commendation of the latter meant more to her at present than anything else in the world.

At half-past two all of the girls except Doris and Alice, who had decided not to enter the meet, retired to their rooms to dress.

"Lily Andrews, you move about like an old woman," teased Ethel. "And if you don't get any more pep than that, you surely won't win."

"If you keep on crying, the lake will overflow the town," put in Ruth.

Lily smiled through her tears. "I can't help it, girls, I'm scared about Marj and Frieda!"

"Oh, I guess they're all right," said Ruth. "Try to brace up, Lil."

By quarter of three the young people had all assembled on the porch, ready to get into the cars that stood waiting at the steps. They were gazing doubtfully at the sky, for the clouds which had been gathering for the last half hour now hung dark and threatening above them.

"I guess Bob was right," remarked Jack. "We're due for a down-pour!"

"Maybe it will pass over," said Ruth, optimistically. She longed for her chance to prove herself the victor; now it seemed impossible that some unforseen circumstance like rain might spoil it all.

"You can't any of you go a step!" announced Mrs. Andrews, suddenly appearing in the doorway. "There's going to be an awful storm!"

Ruth was about to open her mouth in another utterance of protest when the rain began to pour down in torrents.

"Well, that settles it!" said Mr. Remington. "No more argument now!"

"But it might clear in time," said Ruth hopefully.

"It doesn't look much like it," said Miss Phillips.

Ruth turned away, dismayed, angered, and disheartened. Harold had been successful, but all to no purpose. Curling up in the corner of the hammock, she gave herself up to her own gloomy thoughts.

"And I wonder where Marj and Frieda are now," observed Doris.

"And Harold," added Ruth.

"And John and Bob," said Mr. Andrews.

The rain became so heavy that the guests were forced to seek shelter indoors. Abandoning all idea of holding the meet, the girls excused themselves to change their swimming suits for ordinary clothing.

About four o'clock the rain slackened to a slow drizzle, and promised to continue for the remainder of the afternoon and evening. At half past four one of Mr. Andrews's big machines stopped at the steps and to everyone's intense relief, Bob and John jumped out. The girls were with them! And so was Harold Mason!

"We found Marj and Frieda several miles up the road, taking refuge from the rain in a house, and poor Mason was sitting all alone in his busted Lizzie!" said John in answer to the eager questions put to them from all present.

The sight of the wet, bedraggled girls in their bathing suits suddenly struck the rest of the party humorously, and with one accord they burst into uncontrollable laughter. When this had finally subsided, Frieda told the story, taking all the blame upon herself.

"And we were scared for fear that old man had got hold of you again," said Lily, after the ac-

count was finished. "You didn't see anything of him, did you?"

"Only his beard," laughed Marjorie, drawing the shock of grey hair from her pocket. "I found this in the back of Harold's car."

Although the owner was inwardly dumbfounded at these words, only Marjorie and Ruth noticed any embarrassment in his manner as he stumbled upon an explanation.

"Oh, that!" he laughed. "I'm Foxy Grandpop in a play at home, and that's part of the makeup. And that reminds me, Mrs. Andrews, that we have a dress rehearsal tomorrow which I must attend, so I'm afraid I'll have to leave right away."

"But your car——" interrupted Jack.

"I'll have to go by train. But if I phone to the garage to go get it and fix it up, couldn't you drive it down, Wilkinson? Or Ruth—could you——?"

"Certainly," answered Ruth, perceiving how uncomfortable Harold's position was, and realizing how he longed to escape. "Go by all means. It'll be a lark to drive it down!"

"And I promise not to touch the wheel, Mr. Mason," said Frieda penitently, as the guests separated to dress for dinner.

Since the rain seemed likely to continue all evening, Mrs. Andrews suggested a program of bridge and other games. The young people assented joyfully, pleading, however, for half an hour or so to

make their final tennis arrangements; for Mr. Andrews said he could postpone the entries no longer.

Immediately after dinner, with a feeling of something like relief, Ruth watched Harold depart. Fearing that Marjorie might know more than she should about the adventure, she wished to have the remainder of the incident banished from their presence. Then, too, she felt that Harold kept the other boys away from her: he regarded her almost as his personal property. True, no one had asked her for the tennis tournament, but she was confident that as soon as he was out of the way, some one would; for, after all, there was one more boy than girl at the house party.

"I will read the entries that I have so far," announced Mr. Andrews, calling the young people to attention. "And those who haven't already registered, please ask your girl, and do so without delay.

"Griffith Hunter and Marjorie Wilkinson;
Dick Roberts and Lily Andrews:
Mr. Remington and Miss Phillips;
Roger Harris and Doris Sands;
John Hadley and Frances Wright;
David Conner and Ethel Todd.

"Now, are there any others?"

"Yes, sir," said Lawrence Field, in the pause that followed. "I wish to enter with Eloise Trowbridge."

"And Florence Evans has consented to play with me," said Raymond Hancock.

"And Jeanne Trowbridge with me," announced Max Stanton.

"Well, Ruth," said Jack, loud enough for everybody to hear, "since your 'steady' has gone, will you condescend to play with me?"

"Delighted!" she replied, as if she would rather play with Jack than with anyone else in the world. In reality she was chagrined to have been neglected by John Hadley and Lawrence Field.

"Well, we must have two more entries," said Mr. Andrews. "We have ten, and we need twelve, you know."

"I hardly know the game," said Frieda, "but I'll be glad to enter, as Bob suggested, if you want me to."

"Then I'll enter, too," agreed Alice, "since Stanley has been kind enough to ask me. But I'm only a beginner."

"And when does the canoe meet come off?" asked Marjorie.

"Saturday morning!" replied Mrs. Andrews; "and the tennis finals Friday afternoon."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TENNIS TOURNAMENT

"WHAT luck!" cried Ruth exultantly, as she stood before the big white card on which the contestants in the tennis tournament were lined up.

"Why, whom do you play first?" asked Doris, leaning over her shoulder.

"Alice and Stanley," she replied. "So I guess there is no doubt that Jack and I will reach the second round."

"And how many sets do we play?" asked Doris, searching for her own name on the card.

"It's the best out of three, except for the finals—then the best out of five."

"Well, we won't worry about the finals, will we, Roger?" she turned smiling toward her partner, who was standing just behind her.

"No, I think David Conner and Ethel Todd will knock us out in short order!"

"Oh, look!" interrupted Ruth. "Poor Marj has to play Miss Phillips and Mr. Remington first! Tough luck!"

"What's this I hear?" asked Marjorie, just coming into the hall.

Ruth repeated her announcement, and Marjorie contemplated the schedule mournfully. She feared that she would be put out in the first round, unless her partner, Griffith Hunter, were a perfect genius at the game.

"But you can't expect to win everything," said Ruth. "You're pretty sure of the canoe meet——"

The conversation was interrupted by the sound of the gong, summoning them to breakfast. They all turned to answer its welcome call immediately.

"I suppose you've all read the schedule," said Mr. Andrews, when they were seated around the table. "Mrs. Andrews pulled the names out at random, so there can be no dissatisfaction.

"Now would you consider it too strenuous a program to play off the first match this morning, and then report at luncheon? I think it would be interesting to have the winning girl announce the victory in each case."

"And then if we beat, do we have to play the next match after luncheon?" asked Ruth.

"That is to be just as you wish," replied the host. "Or you may leave it till Friday morning."

The meal was eaten amid a confusion of questions and answers, everyone asking everyone else whom they played first, and instantly forgetting the answer.

"I wish we could begin right after breakfast," said Ruth. "I hate to waste time digesting a meal!"

"Aren't we lucky that it is clear?" observed Jack. "Another day of suspense would be agony."

As soon as breakfast was concluded all the young people, except Ruth and Jack, established themselves on the porch. But this energetic couple were so restless that, in order to pass the time more quickly, Jack suggested a walk to the garage to see how the repairs on Harold's car were progressing.

"Do you think we stand a chance of winning?" asked Ruth as they made their way along the winding drive. "I don't mean the first round—but the finals!"

"I don't know," replied her companion. "I've never seen lots of those people play."

"It hardly seems fair for Mr. Remington and Miss Phillips to go in it, does it? Still, so long as they did, it is good luck to have Marj and Mr. Hunter up against them the first thing. I guess they'll feel pretty sick after their first match is over."

"Marj is pretty good, though," said Jack; "if I do say it myself. She's been playing with me and some of the fellows ever since school stopped, and I've got to hand it to her. Her serve is out of sight!"

"Indeed!" said Ruth, stiffly. "She certainly must have improved, for I never had any difficulty beating her at school."

"Well, it all depends upon Hunter," replied the boy. "We shall see."

When they returned from their walk, they found the courts already crowded. Everyone, except Marjorie and Griffith and their opponents, who had secured the court belonging to the place, was playing at the club.

As Ruth had surmised, their match with Alice and Stanley was so easy that she had ample time to watch the others. They took two sets straight, losing only two games during the entire time.

Ruth noticed that most of the other sets were won just as easily. Since Frieda was a decided beginner, she and Bob lost heavily to Max Stanton and Jeanne Trowbridge; and Lily and Dick were defeated in the same manner by John and Frances. The other two sets were more evenly contested.

Ruth's thoughts flew to Marjorie and she wondered how that set was progressing. If she could only see it—to get some idea of how Mr. Remington and Miss Phillips played, so that she might be better prepared to oppose them when her turn came. Glancing toward Jack, who was sitting beside her on the bench, she suggested,

"Let's go home, and get a look at Marj's match! They're probably being beaten to pieces."

"You seem to enjoy the prospect!" laughed Jack.

"Well, it's only that your sister wins everything

she can lay her hands on, and it is a satisfaction to see her take a back seat once in a while."

But when they reached the grounds, they saw the tennis players, hot and tired, walking toward the house.

"Who won?" called Jack.

"And what was the score?" put in Ruth.

"You'll find out at luncheon," returned Miss Phillips, teasingly. "Wait and see."

Ruth suppressed an expression of anger, and made no reply. It seemed to her that Miss Phillips always chose to make herself as irritating as possible. She resolved, however, to say nothing further to Marjorie. But when lunch time came, she was almost consumed with curiosity.

"Let us have the announcements," said Mr. Andrews, when everyone was served. "Please report in the order your names appear on the tournament card."

"6-0, 6-2," announced Ruth, triumphantly, secretly delighted that her name led the list.

Frances Wright and Ethel Todd each reported somewhat similar victories; and then the two Trowbridge girls, who had been invited for luncheon, reported their successes. While everyone was looking for Miss Phillips to report her score, to their great consternation, Marjorie Wilkinson stood up.

"3-6; 8-6; 6-3," she said smilingly.

"How did you ever do it!" cried Ruth, dropping her bread and butter.

"Mr. Hunter and Miss Wilkinson are some players!" said Mr. Remington. "Not because they beat us," he added hastily, in confusion.

"Congratulations to everybody!" said Mrs. Andrews. "I think you all did well."

"And are any of you anxious to play this afternoon?" asked their host.

"Not I!" sighed Marjorie. "I'm all in."

"I'd like to," said Ruth; "at least if it suits Frances and John.

"Perfectly," replied the girl.

The third group followed their example, so that two lively matches were scheduled for three o'clock.

"Are you sure you're not tired?" asked Jack, as he and Ruth went to the club together.

"I never felt better in my life."

"By the way, Hadley doesn't look as if he had much pep, does he? I wonder what's the matter?"

"Oh, he's heart broken because Marj chose to go swimming instead of coming to cheer him on. She is a hard-hearted creature!"

"Marj doesn't think a whole lot about boys," replied Jack. "It's tennis, and canoeing, and scouts with her, all the time!"

Ruth was right about John Hadley; he went on the court without enthusiasm, almost as if he regarded the game as lost before he played it. Ruth

and Jack, on the other hand, played for all they were worth. The first game was hotly contested, but when John lost it finally on a deuce score, he seemed to abandon all effort. The match resulted in an easy victory for his opponents.

"And now for the semi-finals," said Ruth. "I wish it were tomorrow morning now."

"I don't!" cried Jack, emphatically. "I want a good night's sleep."

The number of players had now so materially decreased that everyone could keep track of the games. And everyone knew, too, that both Ruth and Marjorie were still in the tournament, although they would not be matched against each other unless they both reached the finals.

This, however, proved to be actually the case. For both Trowbridge girls, although good players at times, were uncertain and erratic, and both fell down under the severe strain. Ruth and Marjorie, and their opponents, and their partners as well, both used their heads, defeating their opponents by skill in placing the ball. Both matches were interesting and well fought, and the victories a credit to the winners. The congratulations poured in from every side.

"But think of playing *five* sets this afternoon!" gasped Marjorie, sinking to the ground. "I'm dead!"

"Want to forfeit?" challenged Ruth.

"Never!" declared Marjorie.

"Then you can't postpone it!"

"Oh, I don't care. We'll do the best we can, won't we, Mr. Hunter?"

"Indeed, we will," replied the young man earnestly.

Ruth would have preferred to play the match on the club courts, where everyone in Silvertown might be privileged to attend. But Marjorie's request for the use of the private court had already been granted. Ruth secretly felt that this seeming modesty on the part of her opponent could be traced to the fact that the other girl expected to lose.

"She wants me to win my victory in private, without glory; tomorrow, when her big chance comes to win at the canoe meet, she is willing for all Silvertown to see!"

Ruth smiled grimly; there was nothing to do about it. She concluded to try to make the victory so overwhelming that the news would spread like wildfire all over the town. That would be her only hope of revenge.

The contestants were surprised, however, to see a large group of spectators gathered around the court at three o'clock when the match was scheduled to begin. It was evident that Griffith Hunter and the Trowbridge girls had talked widely of the event, for all parts of Silvertown were represented among those present.

It seemed rather unfortunate to Marjorie to be obliged to play against her brother, for he not only knew most of her strokes, but he never had any difficulty in returning her serve. But on the other hand, Marjorie was just as familiar with Jack's method of playing.

The court, though a splendid one, was half protected from the sun at that time in the afternoon. By a stroke of good luck, Ruth won the right to make her choice, and naturally selected the shady side. So much, she thought, depended upon the opening games.

Whether it was because she was tired, or dazzled by the sun, Marjorie lost the first game—her own serve. Encouraged by this triumph, Ruth put added energy into her serve, and consequently captured the next game easily. When, during the third game, Griffith sent all his serves over swiftly without getting a single return, the spectators fairly shouted in joy. It was not difficult to see which was the more popular girl.

The enthusiasm for their opponents only made Ruth and Jack play all the more swiftly. Indeed, it seemed for a while as if Marjorie and Griffith were not trying. With the exception of the latter's serves, they won not a single game; the first set was over quickly with a score of 6-2 in Ruth's favor.

"Want to rest a while, Marj?" suggested Ruth, in a compromising tone.

"No, indeed!" replied the girl. "I'm just waking up now!"

And it seemed in the minutes that followed that she was right. Trying out a new serve—a cut—she took the first game without a point against her. Then, adopting a new system of team play, which allowed her partner to play net at all times, her side continued to score. The second set was finished even more quickly than the first with a score of 6-1, in Marjorie's favor.

While Marjorie's reserve strength seemed unfailing, Ruth began to realize that she had worked too hard at the beginning. She had not calculated correctly for a five-set match, and she began to be tired. Marjorie noticed this, and skillfully managed to put the balls just beyond her reach. Jack attempted several times to cross the court, and get those his partner missed, but this move proved disastrous in each case, for Griffith returned the ball to an empty court. As Ruth had dreamed, the defeat was overwhelming, but not for Marjorie. The score of the third set was 6-1, and of the final set 6-0.

"I guess you're sorry now you didn't play at the club," whispered Ruth, as the players made their way toward the spectators.

But Marjorie made no reply.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CANOE MEET

With characteristic modesty, Marjorie put aside the congratulations of her friends, and the feeling of inward triumph that her victory had brought her, to fasten her thoughts upon the contest of the following day. For, after all, as she said again and again, the tennis championship belonged rather to Griffith Hunter than to herself.

"I suppose if he had played with Alice, or Frieda, or me," teased Lily, as the girls were getting ready for bed, "that he would have won just the same?"

"No doubt. Oh, Lil, suppose it should rain tomorrow!"

"Oh, it woudn't dare do it again! My, but wasn't it lucky that it did on Wednesday!"

"It certainly was."

"Marj," said Lily, "did Jack tell your parents to put a detective to work searching for that old man?"

"No," replied Marjorie, quietly. "I told him not to tell them anything about it, for—I caught the man myself!"

"You!" cried Lily. "But how—?"

"Sh! I don't want anybody to hear. But since you're going to spend the night with me, I'll tell you the whole story now, just as I have figured it out. But don't tell a soul—I never even said anything about it to Frieda. I'm going to tell Jack when we get home and he promised to say nothing about it till then."

"Why, is it a secret?"

"Yes," answered Marjorie. "Listen!"

Curled up on the same bed, Marjorie proceeded to tell what she had correctly guessed to be the truth —that Harold Mason, in disguise, was really the old man. She described his appearance, and showed the grey hair. Then, too, she reminded Lily of his embarrassment at seeing it, and his urgent desire to make his escape.

"And that accident was all cooked up, too," she concluded. Of course he couldn't make Frieda want to drive the car, and run into a tree, but he was going to get around it somehow—to make us late for the meet."

Lily was so angry now that she could scarcely sit still.

"And do you suppose that Ruth knew all about it?"

"Positively!"

"I'm going to go accuse her, this very minute!" flashed Lily, jumping off the bed.

But Marjorie restrained her.

"Don't Lil; it won't do any good. She'll deny that she had any part in it. But I've let her know that I have solved the problem, and she's pretty uncomfortable when I'm around. The best thing we can do about it is to ignore it—and her, as far as possible, without seeming rude."

"Well, she's no longer a friend of mine!" exclaimed Lily.

"No, nor anybody else's in the troop," added Marjorie. "For I think most of the girls have found her out!"

Saturday proved to be cooler, and delightful; the girls were up early to enjoy the fine air of the morning.

"But I don't move from this porch till time to dress for the meet," announced Marjorie, with a significant glance at Ruth. "I'm not taking any chances."

At eleven o'clock the Girl Scouts, all in bathing suits covered by raincoats, drove in the machines to the shore of the lake. Already crowds of people were sitting on the benches, and standing on the shore, waiting for the meet to start.

Through a megaphone Mr. Remington thanked the audience for their splendid support, and announced the relay and obstacle races which were to constituted the first part of the program. These, he

said, were not included in the reckoning of points for the silver cup, and ribbons would be awarded to the successful teams. As lots were drawn to determine the participants of each side, the rivalry was not sharp; in fact Ruth, Frieda, and Marjorie, the three best canoeists, were all on the same side, so that they easily came in ahead. The real excitement lay in the individual contests.

The first of these was the rescue of the capsized canoe. Only five of the girls entered the event; Ethel Todd, Marjorie Wilkinson, Ruth Henry, Frieda Hammer, and Florence Evans. They all succeeded in their attempts; it would have been hard for the casual observer to decide whether to award the honors to Marjorie, Ruth, or Frieda. The judges—three men of Silvertown—put down mysterious marks in their books.

A short intermission of rest was granted the contestants before the final event—the individual canoe race. All of the girls had agreed to enter, although several of them—Doris, and Lily, and Alice Endicott, for example—knew that they stood not the slightest chance of winning. The distance required was across the lake and back—probably about three hundred yards.

The girls knelt in the center of their canoes, their paddles in their hands, awaiting the signal of departure. As soon as the whistle blew, the nine

canoes shot forward, as if controlled by a single hand.

But they did not remain abreast long, for in a moment four fell back. And of the five in the lead, Ruth Henry's came first!

"Hurry up, Marjorie! Oh, hurry!" cried Eloise Trowbridge, now a staunch friend of the girl.

"But Marjorie knew what she was doing; the race was by no means short, and she calculated that endurance would count. Ruth Henry's mighty effort could not last to the end; she would give out before they were three quarters finished. So Marjorie continued her steady strokes, now leaving all but Ruth behind, and taking her place as second.

It was Ruth's canoe which first reached the farther shore, and started to swing around. But here she encountered one of her weaknesses: she had never learned to turn a canoe gracefully and quickly. Before she had swung into position again, Marjorie was beside her, and the two canoes turned almost together.

But Ruth was still confident. She had beaten Marjorie to this shore with an equal start; now that she was slightly ahead there ought to be no doubt about her victory. But her muscles stiffened under the strain; she realized suddenly that she was tired! Marjorie shot ahead with renewed vigor, as if she were fresh for the race.

As the canoes neared the middle of the lake again, Ruth took a fresh spurt and pulled two or three inches ahead of Marjorie; but the gain was temporary, for the latter, carefully measuring her distance, decided that now was the time for putting forth her utmost effort. With sudden, swift strokes, she left all the canoes behind, and made like lightning for the shore. A great shout went up from the spectators; she arrived fully three seconds before Frieda, who came second. For Ruth had fallen back to third place!

In a moment, Mr. Andrews was calling for Marjorie, and holding up the beautiful silver cup. The girl, out of breath, but smiling happily, advanced to accept the award with a bow of acknowledgement. The meet was over.

Turning around to look for Lily, Marjorie almost bumped into the Trowbridge girls, waiting anxiously to be the first to congratulate her.

"And mother and father want you to spend the second week in August with us," said Jeanne, as she took Marjorie's arm; "so that you can take part in the big carnival. Can you?"

"I'd love to!" cried Marjorie, catching sight of Ruth's envious face behind her. Surely the girl was being punished now, in the bitterest way possible: to see Marjorie surrounded by the honor and social distinction that she coveted for herself!

The Trowbridge girls and Griffith Hunter were the only outsiders at the banquet that night. But it was a festive occasion; the table was laden with flowers, and the ten-course dinner was served noiselessly and beautifully. On one side of Marjorie sat John Hadley; on the other her new friend Griffith Hunter; and she could not tell which was the more entertaining.

Suddenly, at the end of the salad course, a piano in the living room struck up a wedding march. The guests all stopped eating to behold little Dorothy Trowbridge, a tiny tot of about four years of age, appear, dressed in a filmy costume, and bearing a Cupid's dart in her hand. She went towards a side table, upon which Mr. Andrews lifted her, and in her clear childish voice, she said,

"I am here to tell you that Mr. Remington and Miss Phillips are going to be married!"

Amid the exclamations of the whole party, the blushing captain held up her left hand to display a beautiful diamond ring; while Mr. Remington bowed in acknowledgement of the congratulations that poured in from all sides.

"But we'll lose you at Miss Allen's!" wailed Marjorie, in distress.

"But not as Scout Captain," replied Miss Phillips. "For I promise to take Pansy troop to the official scout camp next summer, and I mean to do as I said!"

"Thank goodness for that!" breathed Lily, in relief.

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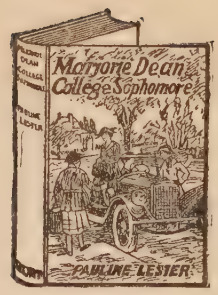

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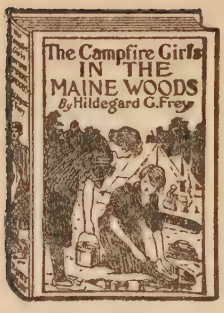

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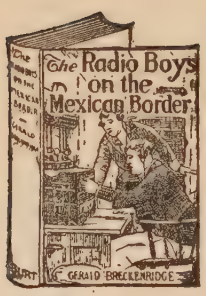

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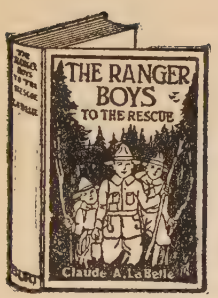

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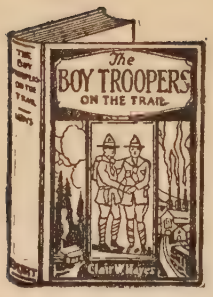

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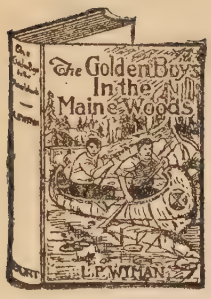

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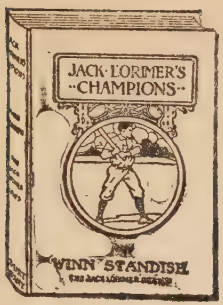

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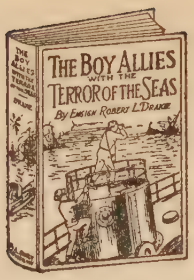

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